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The Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series

Richard Forman

LAUNCHING BORDEAUX-STYLE WINES IN THE NAPA VALLEY:
STERLING VINEYARDS, NEWTON VINEYARD, AND FORMAN VINEYARD

Interviews Conducted by
Carole Hicke
in 1999

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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FORMAN, Richard W. (b. 1944)

Owner, Forman Vineyard

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Childhood in Oakland, CA, and education at UC Davis; working at Stony Hill Vineyard and Robert Mondavi Winery, 1967-1968; developing Sterling Vineyards, 1969-1978: barrel fermentation in French oak, second Merlot in Napa valley, travel and research in Europe; partner and developer of Newton Vineyard, 1978-1982; owner of Forman Vineyard, 1983 to present: finding the property, innovative building, equipment, tunnels; thoughts on public taste, avant-garde winemaking in Bordeaux-style wines, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot.

Interviewed in 1999 by Carole Hicke for the Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series, the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Richard Forman

PREFACE	i
INTERVIEW HISTORY	vii
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	viii
I BACKGROUND	1
Family Roots	1
Growing Up in Oakland and Grass Valley	3
University and Graduate School, UC Davis	12
II EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES	16
Summer Jobs	16
Stony Hill Vineyard, 1967	18
Robert Mondavi, 1968	19
III STERLING VINEYARDS, 1969-1978	21
Hiring On	21
Designing the Plant	22
First Crush at Schramsburg; Pioneering Barrel Fermentation	25
An Early Merlot Varietal	29
Travel and Research in Europe	30
Pioneering Winemaking Techniques; Importance of Barrel Fermentation	34
1976 Trip with Dan Duckhorn; Other Trips	35
Hedging	38
David Abreu's Farming Business	40
First Wines of Sterling	42
Chardonnay sans Malolactic	45
Different Techniques Required in California Vineyards	48
Taking Risks, and a Hands-On Management Technique	51
Sterling Wines in the Early Seventies	53
Plant and Equipment	58
Winemaking at Sterling Mid- to Late Seventies	62
Decision to Join Newton	63
IV NEWTON VINEYARD, 1978-1982	66
Vineyard Property	66
Planting the Grapes	68
Building and Equipment	72
Cooperage: The Forman Barrel	74
Winemaking Techniques	76
The 1979, 1980, and 1981 Wines	78
Dissolving the Partnership	80
V FORMAN VINEYARD, 1983 TO PRESENT	83
Selecting and Developing the Vineyard Property	83

Consulting for Woltner and Charles Shaw	88
1983: A Crucial Year	89
Building an Efficient and Innovative Winery	90
Equipment	95
Tunnels	96
Wines of 1983 to 1986	101
Canopy Management	103
Pioneering Introduction of Petit Verdot	104
Merlot and Cabernet Franc	106
Association with David Abreu	106
Rutherford Star Vineyard--Chardonnay	109
Forman Wine Library	113
VI EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC TASTES AND WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES	115
Chardonnay	115
Cabernet Sauvignon	118
Vineyard Management Tools	121
Forman Vineyard: Present and Future	122
Wine Industry Overview	124
TAPE GUIDE	128
APPENDIX	
Forman Vineyard publicity (various)	129
INDEX	147

PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated by Ruth Teiser in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed has been made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Carole Hicke, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

Until her death in June 1994, Ruth Teiser was project originator, initiator, director, and conductor of the greater part of the oral histories. Her book, Winemaking in California, co-authored with Catherine Harroun and published in 1982, was the product of more than forty years of research, interviewing, and photographing. (Those wine history files are now in The Bancroft Library for researcher use.) Ruth Teiser's expertise and knowledge of the wine industry contributed significantly to the documenting of its history in this series.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grapegrowing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of winemen. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his or her own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Carole Hicke
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Wine
Oral History Series

July 1998
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

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- Albert J. Winkler, *Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921-1971)*, 1973
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INTERVIEW HISTORY by Carole Hicke

Richard Forman grew up interested in the outdoors, in chemistry, and in trying out new experiments. He was a natural to become an innovative and precedent-making winemaker in the Napa Valley.

After studying food science and enology at the University of California at Davis, with early work experiences at Stony Hill Vineyard and Robert Mondavi Winery, he took up Peter Newton's challenge to build and develop Sterling Vineyards, starting in 1968. At Sterling he began processes which were new for the Napa Valley, but not for French wineries, such as barrel fermentation for Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay. Traveling to France with increasing frequency, Forman found more and more ideas that he liked, and he put these ideas into practice. At Sterling he made the second-ever Merlot produced in the Napa Valley.

After Sterling was sold to Coca-Cola, Forman went into partnership with Newton in 1978 to develop Newton Vineyard, where he cleared and planted the vineyards, built the winery, and continued to make wines in the Bordeaux style.

Always an individualist, Forman finally decided to produce his own wines from his innovative and efficient winery built above St. Helena. He is especially proud of the tunnels there, where he can store barrels without stacking them. He carries his Cabernet one step further toward the French style by adding a small amount of Petit Verdot--one of the many examples where his leadership has been followed by other winemakers.

Forman was interviewed in his beautiful home, which is built above the winery and includes his office. The interviews took place on February 24, March 3, and March 19, 1999, following in general the outline prepared and sent to him. I reviewed the transcript for clarity and sent it to him, but in spite of repeated requests, he failed to review it himself.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke, Interviewer/Editor

July 2000
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Richard (Ric) Wallace Forman

Date of birth May 18 '44 Birthplace Oakland, California

Father's full name Robert White Forman

Occupation Interior Design Birthplace Hayward, California

Mother's full name Rosalind Wallace Forman

Occupation Teacher Birthplace Pamona, California

Your spouse not married

Occupation _____ Birthplace _____

Your children Tobias Dale Forman

Where did you grow up? Oakland, Calif.

Present community St. Helena

Education U.C. Davis, B.S., M.S. Food Science

Occupation(s) Winemaker

Areas of expertise all areas, Vita & Enol. Premium
wine production specializing in Chardonnay
& Cabernet

Other interests or activities Hiking, Bicycling, Gardening
Travel

Organizations in which you are active Am Soc Vit. & Enol.,
Napa Valley Wine Lib. Assoc.

I BACKGROUND

[Interview 1: February 24, 1999] ##¹

Family Roots

Hicke: Let's start with when and where you were born.

Forman: I was born on May 18, 1944, in Oakland, California.

Hicke: Now I'm going to back up a little bit and ask you to let me know about your ancestors.

Forman: I don't know an awful lot. We have a small family, I guess you could say. My father, Robert White Forman, was born actually in Hayward. It was in 1905 he was born. I never did meet his father, but his father was named Dick, Richard, whom I was named after. He was an engineer. I think one of his projects was Boulder Dam. He died relatively early, and I never did meet him.

Hicke: Can you tell me why your name is spelled without the "e" as in Foreman?

Forman: Well, it's just a spelling. There are various spellings. I am of English parentage, and the English spelling of Forman is without an "e"--as far as we can determine, anyway.

I didn't really know my grandparents very well. Then my dad lived with his mom up in Hayward.

Hicke: What did your grandfather do in Hayward?

Forman: I'm not even sure he lived there. On the other hand, on my mother's side, her father was a doctor in Pomona.

¹## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

Hicke: You're a Californian.

Forman: Yes, true. My mother's mother, whom I certainly never met because she died when my mother was only seven, was--I'm not sure what she did. I think she was kind of into acting. I know she was very interested in the theater, which is why she made my mother, Rosalind--

Hicke: What was her maiden name?

Forman: Wallace, a pretty English name. So anyway, my grandparents I didn't spend much time with. Really no. My father had no siblings, so there were no relatives there, and my mother had one brother by the name of Caleb. But they called him Kay. Let's just say his name is Kay, K-a-y, I guess. He was quite an entrepreneur in Pomona and had all sorts of ranching projects and one thing and another, and did very well for himself, I believe. Flew airplanes and had sailboats and did lots of things. He was a nice guy. He's now dead as well. My mother is really the only surviving one. My mother is ninety-one, and she's quite active. She lives out in the Walnut Creek area, Danville area actually, on the Crow Canyon Country Club fairway there, in a condominium.

She went to school in Pomona, Pomona College, and had a teaching degree and taught nursery school classes for a while. She did that up in the North Bay, not down in Los Angeles. Went to school at a convent for a while, I know. Had an interesting background. My mother's father, my grandfather, was very interested in horses as well, so she rode horses a lot--kind of English-style horse riding: jumping and so forth.

Anyway, my mother had some interesting experiences. She'd tell me about growing up in the orange grove. I'll never forget the story she told one time that some poor Mexican was just screaming and yelling outside the window. Evidently, he'd drunk methyl alcohol instead of alcohol. I don't know where in the devil he got it, but she said it was the most awful thing she could ever remember as a child.

She used to really enjoy riding through the orange groves. In fact, another interesting part of her childhood was knowing Will Rogers. She used to know him quite well. He lived close to them. She said she used to love to go over and sit on the porch and talk to him, and he was very friendly with her and obviously quite a personality. That was kind of fun for my mother.

My grandfather was very affluent. He had done quite well in the medical practice and had done also extremely well in real estate, so they lived fairly well.

Hicke: Did she tell you any stories about Will Rogers?

Forman: Oh, I'm sure she has in the past and, you know, I didn't pay much attention to it when I was younger because he didn't mean very much to me. Now I know what a personality he was. I heard and I realized, because she mentioned it, that he was obviously important, but it didn't really make much difference. I suppose if I asked her now--haven't thought about it in years, but if I asked her now she probably could recall something.

Hicke: I'll bet she could.

Forman: But we haven't talked about it in years and years.

So that's not an awful lot to say about my grandparents because we didn't do much together.

Growing Up in Oakland and Grass Valley

Forman: I grew up in Oakland. Went to Oakland Tech. In fact, my father went to Oakland Tech, which is kind of interesting. But I think it was a very good school. I enjoyed it. I had a lot of good friends. We enjoyed living in the hills of Oakland. It was in the area, actually, that a few years ago had that horrible fire. We had a terrific home. There's another story which I'll relate in a moment, but I had burned it once myself with my chemistry lab. But it burned a lot more severely with the Oakland fire anyway, and it was kind of sad to see it go.

Hicke: Were your parents still there?

Forman: No, they weren't, fortunately. We had sold it. But it sat up on one of the ridge lines and just had this magnificent view of San Francisco. I'll never forget. My bedroom had these windows that looked over the entire bay. I remember going back there recently, just to see, because it was sad to see where the fire had--what it had done. I'm standing approximately where the house was, looking out over. It was just remarkable to remember how the view was. It was dazzling.

Hicke: How many places you've been where there are views? Because you have a magnificent view of Napa Valley here.

Forman: Yes, I must like views, that's true. But growing up, I was lucky also, but I had a lot of fun in the city of Oakland, particularly where we lived, because--I don't know--I had a very creative mind,

I guess, and I had friends who were the same. We found lots of things to do. Lots of trouble to get into.

Hicke: How about an example here?

Forman: As I said, I was very interested in chemistry at a very young age. Unfortunately, one of the paths that it led me to was a fascination with pyrotechnics. Even in junior high school I would find these books and various recipes. In those days, it was very easy to get chemicals. You could go to these chemical supply companies, which we found out about. We'd just go down. They would have no problem selling you these incredible chemicals.

So we'd go home and we'd manufacture all these wild things. At one point, I was trying to make a chemical called mercury fulminate, which is a frightening chemical, highly explosive. It's a detonator chemical, and it required 95 percent ethanol as part of the reactant to produce it. That was hard to get, so I decided I'd make it, so I concocted a sugar solution with nutrients. Mind you, I was only about thirteen years old, but I figured out how to do it, and I distilled quite a large quantity of it. I had about a gallon to distill again, to get high proof. I was doing it, and unfortunately the flask broke, and I was stupid enough to be doing it with a flame, and it lit on fire--lit me on fire, too. Fortunately, I didn't get scarred, but I was burned pretty nastily on my face and arms.

My parents weren't home. It was on a weekend, and they were over at some neighbor's house a couple of miles away. So I ran down the street to a friend of mine's house, whose father was a doctor, and he took one look at me and we went to the hospital, but in the meantime the house burned up! It didn't burn right to the ground, but it took six months before we were back into it. It was pretty much gutted. That's one of the examples.

But we had lots of fun.

Hicke: I was really asking for examples of the things you did, but that's an example, I guess. You said you did a lot of things with other kids.

Forman: Well, we'd hike all around the hills, and we'd have forts in the craziest places you could think of. We enjoyed--well, like all kids, you know--riding your bicycle all around. I remember riding through the cemetery, which was quite a wonderful cemetery in the Oakland hills. I remember we used to have fun going out at night on the weekends with a flashlight and going into the old part of the cemetery, where these old, old crypts--honestly, it was the

most frightening thing you could think of as a young kid. But we loved it. We loved to tantalize ourselves with the fear.

Hicke: Like for Halloween.

Forman: Yes. Anyway, we were always very busy. And then I started to say I was also lucky in that I was able to have fun even in a city, as most people would think you could only do in the country. I always found places to go, places to hike, forts to be built, things to do that were recreational, not in a sports sense but in a venture sense, even in the city.

But my mother was very determined for our family--which consisted of my brother, who is five years older than I--

Hicke: His name is?

Forman: Peter. He's a dentist. They thought that it would be nice to get out of the city for weekends and summers, and so she was determined to find a summer home. At about age seven for me, she began looking around for the family to find a summer home. It's really intriguing. She started looking in the Napa Valley, of all things. One of the places she looked at was Schramsberg. It was for sale. God knows, I wish she had bought it.

My father determined that it was too hot here, and there were too many rattlesnakes. He hates rattlesnakes. And there's no fishing here, so we couldn't fish. It's really too close to the Bay Area. It's too warm. So she said, "Fine, I'll forget the Napa Valley," which is really a coincidence that it started there, not having any idea that I'd land here.

So she went up to the foothills above Auburn in the Grass Valley area, and we did ultimately find a fantastic place: this wonderful, old, six-gabled house that a woman artist and her husband artist had built. Had these beautiful grounds, with big, giant cherry trees all around. It was really a wonderful place. It had been the site of an old gold mine and so there were lots of gold mine timbers in the house.

We proceeded to make a beautiful estate/summer home out of it. My mother was a fabulous gardener. She had a vegetable garden that would have dazzled Sunset [magazine] in every given year that she did it. It was amazing. She'd be up at five in the morning every morning, tending to that. People wouldn't believe--

Hicke: You mean up in Grass Valley?

Forman: Up in Grass Valley. We'd go up there as soon as school got out--my brother and I and my mother would go up, and my father would work in the week and come up on the weekend. We'd spend the entire summer up there. During the school year, we'd go up occasionally on weekends. We had a great time. This was a complete fascination to me because there was so much to do. I had tons to do in the Bay Area; now, given the country environment and the time that we happened to land there, when the little towns were just getting over the gold-mining era--some of the mines were still operating; if they weren't operating, they were just closing down. The town was old and more or less unsecured and insecured as far as having tight regulations and everything, so I was just fascinated.

I'd get on my bicycle and ride over to these mines and go into all the crazy places they had and all the labs. They were closed, and I would be able to get in and look at it all. I mean, I was just in heaven. I'd go into tunnels. I remember crawling through the roots of trees the animals had dug out through the shafts and getting down into these big caverns and all. It just went on and on and on. It was so much fun.

And the mines were a tremendous fascination to me. I loved the tunnels, and I loved all the sort of--this was low-grade ore, so they all used the cyanide treatment plants. They were like big fermenters. That whole process, the cyanide fermentation of the pulverized ore and all that--I got very fascinated with the chemistry of it.

Hicke: More chemistry.

Forman: More chemistry, yes. I was just really delighted with it.

Hicke: I'm surprised they weren't fenced.

Forman: No, there was nothing. You could go and do anything. There were no locked doors. It looked like they just walked and abandoned them. The labs were there. It was crazy. It was a paradise. I remember the old assay still had all the old papers on the desk and everything. It was like everybody had just walked away.

It's a museum now. It's all a museum. As a child from about seven to about sixteen or seventeen, I had free access to anything and everything, and it was untouched. It was just absolutely a delight to me because I had a very inquisitive mind, and I was always wanting a new adventure. I had good friends who loved the same thing.

Hicke: So you had a set of friends up there as well as--

Forman: No, I would import them. My father would come up and bring a buddy of mine for a week or so, and he'd stay with me until he came back the following weekend. We got into all kinds of trouble and had lots of fun, just having a good time, the way young kids do. We were able to do more and get away with more than we possibly could now. You can't go anywhere or do anything of the nature that we did.

We had a wonderful lake on the property, and so we had boating, and we had--my brother and I--we had lots of places we could fish, and so there was fishing and just unending hiking, and so that was great for me. I had both country life and city life, and I think was very enriched for it.

Hicke: Yes, it sounds like it.

Forman: One of my first experiences with fermentation was--my parents were big entertainers. Mother is still a fabulous cook. They were very social and did, as I say, lots of entertaining. We always had a black lady living with us that helped my mom. This one gal named Dorothy--she was a wonderful woman--I don't know how she knew about it because she didn't drink alcohol herself, but she told me that you could ferment the fruits on these trees.

One day I decided that sounded like a great idea, so I picked as many of the cherries as I could pick from all the trees. I was probably only eight or nine years old. I crushed them all up, and I fermented it. It was the most fun thing. I was totally fascinated with this fermentation process.

Hicke: That was an early start on your career.

Forman: Yes. Then I took it a step further a few years later, once I really understood the process. We had these huge blackberry patches. My brother dug a frog pond down there, and so we had opened up a lot of paths to it. We went and picked just cardboard boxes full of these blackberries one year. I fermented those, and then I took it a step further, and I actually distilled it. So I made this blackberry--what could we call it?--a liqueur, except it wasn't sweet--blackberry brandy, really. So that was fun. I did that probably at age fifteen.

Hicke: Did you taste it?

Forman: Oh, yes! My brother drank a little bit of it. I didn't care about drinking the stuff; I was just fascinated with making it.

Hicke: Oh, that's amazing.

Forman: So that was one of my first introductions to fermentation. It was interesting enough that I knew someday I'd want to do something of that sort. I always knew, from I guess probably--I don't know what age--eight, nine, ten, somewhere in there--that I liked chemistry. Something about it fascinated me. I always had a little chemistry lab and then a bigger lab, and then I was interested--as I said, I was fascinated--with explosives, so I did a lot of explosives chemistry.

I learned a lot from it. I did some very sophisticated things--way too sophisticated for the time, and it was highly dangerous; but you don't know that. My parents hadn't a clue of what I was doing. So I got away with it. I'm lucky I got away with it, but it also taught me a lot. Then the fermentation sorts of things were interesting to me.

I got interested in gold, and so I started doing these gold analyses of the soil around there. I fiddled with all kinds of stuff. Eventually, I knew I was really going to do it. Obviously, these kinds of classes, right from junior high and high school, were the ones I liked most. All the science classes, I was fascinated with.

Hicke: What kinds of science did you take?

Forman: Everything, everything that was offered: biology--all the stuff that was offered.

Hicke: Any particular teachers that were influential?

Forman: Well, not until I got into college, really. They appreciated the fact that I was interested in it, but I don't remember anybody really promoting anything for me or encouraging me in any sort of way. I had enough encouragement on my own. I was fascinated with it. It was fun to me.

Hicke: Did your family drink wine?

Forman: No, no, my family didn't like wine [chuckling]. They were of the old school. They were bourbon drinkers. I guess when they entertained sometimes they drank wine. They ultimately stopped drinking hard liquor and started drinking wine once I started getting into the business, but that was a long time after. No, I had no influence of wine around the family. They knew nothing about it. So I came by that strictly through chemistry and my interest in agriculture and being outside and one thing and another.

Hicke: Did you ever find any gold?

Forman: Yes. I had a buddy of mine. We made some really neat equipment. God, we worked so hard on this thing. I recall what happened to it the first day, too. I was so mad. We worked for about two weeks, manufacturing this gold dredge, and we were all set to take it up and go into this creek that we thought we'd have good luck with. My brother was going on a fishing trip, and he backed over the thing and crinkled it all up. I could have killed him. I'll never forget it. So we spent another day or two uncrinkling it, and we went up and checked out for gold. We had the right equipment, but the pumps we had wouldn't work, or the creek wasn't right, so we never really did get anything, but it was good experience. We had a lot of fun doing it.

Hicke: Making the--

Forman: Yes, making the thing and getting out there and doing it and seeing how it was done, talking to other people who had done it.

Hicke: Did you do much reading?

Forman: I didn't read very much in my youth.

Hicke: I guess you were too busy.

Forman: Yes, I really was. I wasn't a reader per se. I am now. I don't reach much in the summer, but I read all through the winter and spring when I'm not so busy all day.

Hicke: But you didn't go and get books on how to--

Forman: Oh, yes, of course. Oh, yes, we read up on gold mining. I read a lot of chemistry books, but that's hardly reading. It was fascinating. God, at age fourteen or fifteen, I'd be up at the engineering library at Berkeley. I learned how to get these books, and I'd go in and I'd read all this stuff. I was fascinated with it. So that interested me, but not novel-type reading.

Hicke: I'd call that reading.

Forman: Well, it was reading, yes. I certainly could read. I read an odd set of stuff, but I did.

Hicke: Are there any of your friends that you particularly remember?

Forman: Oh, sure, all of them. A guy named Fritz Henshaw--he was very clever. He was a good builder. He ended up going to Berkeley and getting a degree in electrical engineering. I don't see him much anymore, but he's still a good friend. And a good friend of mine,

named Phil Crane--he and I are concocting a business together right now, trying to sell wine to Japan with a special label that he's come up with. He has a valve business that takes him to Japan often, and so we're kind of working together. I still see him, a great guy.

Hicke: But he's going to sell your wine?

Forman: No, not my wine. We're going to try to buy probably bulk wine and use his special label for it, kind of a celebration wine, he calls it. He's got an idea, and I just offered to help him. Whether it will go anywhere, I don't know.

And then another friend, Frank Potts, became a dentist. I still see him--oh, I don't know--every two or three months.

Hicke: Not on a dental basis, I trust.

Forman: No, no, not with my brother being a dentist.

Hicke: Oh, that's right. Is he up here?

Forman: He practices in Concord, California.

Hicke: How nice.

Forman: So yes, I still do see at least a couple of the old buddies that I had in high school. Obviously, you get out of high school and college and you go to another community, and you make new friends. But I am still close to at least a couple of them, which is fun. We have lots of memories, and we laugh like crazy every time we see each other. It's a kick.

Hicke: One other thing that I find kind of fun to find out is what kinds of foods people like. You said your mother is a great cook.

Forman: Well, yes. And because they entertained and liked to cook so much, at a very young age we learned to eat everything. We weren't fussy kids, and we ate pretty fancy food. I mean, I remember my brother and I would be delighted to think that we were going to have eggs Benedict for breakfast or fried oysters and chicken livers and green fried tomatoes for breakfast. We thought that was just super. So we ate sophisticated food.

My brother and father, actually, more than I were great fishermen and hunters, so we'd eat a lot of wild game: deer, wild ducks, salmon, what have you--everything from stuffed lamb hearts to the normal things. We just thought that was great.

And a lot of vegetables because my mother was such a vegetable farmer. Every single year of my entire life, I would either have a garden in conjunction with my parents or on my own, so I've had fresh vegetables every summer. I always look forward to that. I love them.

Hicke: You're spoiled!

Forman: I know. I love them. I really look forward to the first of the tomatoes and all the special things that I grow. So it's hard to say that there's anything that I don't like. I really love quality food. I mean, you can see that I like to cook by the pots that I have. [points to the kitchen] I'm into it. Those are by no means just decoration. I use them all.

Hicke: They're very decorative, but if you use them all, then I'm really impressed.

Forman: I cook a lot. I'm into cooking with good, fresh ingredients. I'm not what you call a fancy sort of French-style chef. I don't like to do elaborate sauces and all those things. I like to do good ingredients, cooked tastefully with good flavors. I'm not a recipe follower. I kind of invent things. Just like my chemistry. I like to taste things and kind of get an idea of what I think I like about the thing and then try to create something on my own that's around, rather than pick up recipes and follow them. I don't have the patience for that for some reason or other.

Hicke: You're creative to cook that way.

Forman: Yes.

Hicke: You're taking full advantage of being in the Napa Valley, where the gardens--

Forman: Yes, we have good food. This is every bit as nice as Provence in the south of France. We have all these wonderful olives. We have everything, really, that they do. It's incredible. We have some great garden food here and farmers' markets, which supply wonderful stuff during the summer, and obviously, all the great wine and so forth.

Hicke: Okay, so you liked the science courses in high school probably the best?

Forman: Oh, sure. The junior high school was so simple. I was still interested in it, but the high school chemistry was really fascinating. I loved that.

Hicke: Did you learn anything that you didn't already know?

Forman: No, it was pretty simple. I did well in it, obviously. At that point, it was just fun that I did know it all, and it was kind of a kick.

Hicke: You got to mess around in a lab.

Forman: Yes, and I liked it. I had a better lab in my home than the high school had. But it was still fun.

University and Graduate School, UC Davis

Forman: Then, of course, I went to college. I actually started off at San Jose State [University]. I'm not quite sure why. I guess a lot of my friends lived there, and I thought, Well, that sounds good. I was there for a year in the chem department, and one of the professors, a guy named Wilkinson, said, "You know, Ric, you do really like chemistry. I can see that. You do well in it." And he said, "What do you want to do with it?" He kind of said, "Are you interested in straight chemistry as a research chemist, or what would you like? How about wine? Are you interested in wine?"

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Forman: "How about wine?" he said. I said, "What does that have to do with chemistry?" He said, "There's a great deal to do with chemistry. There's a whole department at [University of California at] Davis that's involved in it." I instantly knew that that's what I wanted to do, so I applied to transfer and fortunately had the grades to transfer, and so I transferred to Davis and got right into their Department of Food Science, with the idea that eventually I would get into the enology program. But they didn't have a fermentation science course curriculum to graduate in then. It was food science. So I did all the food science classes in undergraduate school, and then went to graduate school.

Hicke: Wait a minute. You said there were some of your professors that were--

Forman: Oh, I'm sorry. I think this was this one guy at San Jose who quickly re-routed me and got me interested in focusing on what direction I'd like to take the chemistry. I knew very well, right out of high school, that when I went to college, chemistry was

what I wanted to do. My major was picked probably three years before I went to college. So that was simple. But then what I was going to do with it, I really didn't know. That I didn't have any idea, but the more I thought about it after talking to him, the more I realized that I really didn't want to be in just sort of research lab. I needed to be outside a lot. I like the out-of-doors, which is obviously coming from my childhood background, being outdoors all the time, doing things. And I liked agriculture because I was fascinated with the way my family had always had agriculture, even though it was just gardens. That interested me.

So Davis's ag department was definitely where I needed to go. And then, when I thought I could get into the wine business-- I like not only chemistry but the biochemistry, bacteriology part of it fascinated me as well, so I had it all.

Hicke: Any professors at Davis that you recall?

Forman: I was impressed with [Maynard] Amerine. Amerine was very nice to me. I'll never forget the first day, taking his Vit[iculture] III class, which I ended up finally being a reader for, or a TA [teaching assistant] or whatever you want to call it. But I'll never forget him coming into class. I was very impressed with him because he was so dignified. He just had an elegant appearance and manner to him. He also reminded me of a guy who was a friend of my parents whom I just happened to like very much, a guy named Len Richards. He was one of my favorite friends of my parents, so he had this charisma of looks just reminding me of someone whom I had liked from my family, but also he was impressive because he spoke so articulately. He just really looked important, and I realized that this was a step in a very important direction.

I immediately took it seriously because of him, and then I realized, after seeing all the other professors, that I was focusing on something that was really pretty intense and not general in the sense that chemistry was but that there was direction to it. Yes, I was really excited about it and almost fearful because it was so intense and focused in the direction that it was. I felt the specialization immediately.

Hicke: Do you recall anything specifically that you got from him? Philosophy of wine--

Forman: I remember going into his office, and I just remember admiring him because he was obviously so important and well liked in the industry. I admired the way that he tasted wine once I finally got into the classes. Not only did he understand how wine was made, but he understood the history of wine, and he understood the

elegance and the environment that wine achieved if you really appreciated it, and the people that were associated with it all around the world.

He would encourage me. He would say, "Ric, you're doing well, and if you continue to do well, someday the wine business will allow you not only pleasure but affluence, and you will live very well by it." I believed him, and I just felt that he said that's the way it will be, and it has.

Hicke: That's a great characterization of him. You just sort of captured him.

Forman: It is. I always thought he was very special, which he was. I mean, everybody felt that way, but I saw it within the first five minutes. I think I have good intuition. Even then, at a young age, I had it. I realized that it was important immediately. So he was the most important.

And I liked all the others. I remember a guy named Min Akioshi.

Hicke: Min?

Forman: Min. He's a Japanese guy. He was the lab assistant to Hod Berg. He was really encouraging to me. I ended up living with him and his family for a while. He was great guy, a lot of spirit. I think he works for Gallo [Winery] now. He left the university and worked for Gallo, but he was very sharp. Very, very nice to me, and I liked him a lot, so he was encouraging.

Dr. [Ralph] Kunke was wonderful. He became a really good friend and my graduate advisor. I liked Ralph a lot. He was so nice to me and also very encouraging. He was fun. We could go out and laugh, and he also taught me a lot and was very kind and reassuring in my research project. So he was very important to me as well. I admired him. A different sort altogether than Amerine, but I liked him.

I also felt that [Vernon L.] Singleton was probably one of the most intense and creative professors there. Great precision. He was very serious and had a unique sort of approach that no one really had spent much time on, working on his polyphenolics. I think I took the first class on polyphenolics that he taught. He sort of invented the class, and we were the pioneers of it. I thought that was good.

[A. Dinsmore] Dinny Webb was a great professor, too. He was really nice to me. I remember he'd tell me about how his son was

working hard in the chem department, and if you work hard, you make it. He was very fatherly to me about continuing there. I remember having a discussion with him about going to graduate school, and he encouraged it and said that it was a good idea and that you have to work hard, but it will pay for itself in the end.

They were really nice professors. They were very serious, but they were very personable. It was a small department.

Hicke: How many in a class?

Forman: Oh, I think in a graduate class we'd have five, six people in it. My colleagues in the classroom were David Coffrin and Mills Fenghi, Richard Nagaoka, Justin Meyer of Silver Oak, Pete Stern, and Rich Kunde. Five or six others, maybe seven or eight. That was about it.

Hicke: You had an interesting class.

Forman: Yes, yes. You hear some of these names, and we're all around here, still doing it. So it was a good class. It was great.

Hicke: This is graduate school now.

Forman: Graduate school, yes. And it was a little bigger in undergraduate, of course, because you were mixed with all the other classes--history or one thing or another, which was a mixed bag of everybody, but the campus was neat. I really enjoyed it. It was a nice place to live. I could go both back to the Bay Area, where my family lived, or I could go up to our summer home, which I was halfway between. That was nice.

But I was really getting ready to leave by the time I was in graduate school. I was fascinated with it and did well. I did very well.

Hicke: What year did you graduate?

Forman: I graduated in December, half year, in December of 1969.

Hicke: This was under-

Forman: Graduate school, master's degree.

II EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES

Summer Jobs

Hicke: When did you get your bachelor's?

Forman: Oh, I must have gotten that two years previous. By that time-- that was six years of school--I was pretty well ready to leave. I had thought about getting a Ph.D., but I thought No, I really don't need that. And while I was in school, I was very fortunate. I had worked for a couple of wineries. I worked for Stony Hill [Vineyard] in 1967. Fred McCrae was very, very good to me. I really admired Fred, and I liked him a lot--he and Eleanor both. He taught me a lot.

And then I worked for the harvest of '68 at Robert Mondavi [Winery]. That was a wonderful influence as well.

Hicke: We were talking about whether you were going to go for a Ph.D.

Forman: Oh, yes. I just realized that I really wanted to get out and work. I was lucky because the industry was just beginning to take off at that point, and there were new wineries being established, and they needed winemakers. And so at one point I had Peter Newton, through a relation, actually, on his wife's side--Sloane Upton, who owns Three Palms Vineyard, who was taking some classes at Davis and had met me. He encouraged Peter, Peter had talked to Amerine, and Amerine had suggested that he talk to me.

So he came and interviewed me for the job of building and running Sterling Vineyards, the same time Billy Jaeger came and wanted to know if I wanted to be the winemaker for Freemark Abbey, and Bob Mondavi, after I had worked there a season, wanted to know if I wanted to be the winemaker or at least assistant winemaker at Robert Mondavi. So my God, here I am at school, thinking, Is this what it's really like? How could it be so good?

I was really looking forward at that point to getting out and doing something.

Hicke: Yes. Before we get you out, let me back up. Is there anything more to be said about what you did at Stony Hill?

Forman: Oh, sure. There's a lot more. We should not pass that up. That was important. I could go back even further than that. I see in the outline you've made here: what sort of things did I do, what sort of employment did I have while I was growing up? Well, I worked one year--

Hicke: I wasn't going to ask you that because I figured you didn't have any time.

Forman: No, I did. It's kind of interesting. One year I worked on a construction project for a company called C. Norman Peterson. They built sewage treatment plants. That was just straight carpentry construction. I did that one year in high school.

Hicke: Summer?

Forman: Yes, summer. I spent the summer doing that once I was finally too old to just go to the summer home and sit. Once I had a driver's license, the family felt I better start working, and so it was good. So I did that one year.

And then the following year I had a wonderful job working at UC Berkeley in the Chem Department storage room. This was the year they were tearing down the old chem building, and so I was busy all year going into all these incredible labs in the old Chem Department. Remember that old brick building? Did you ever see it?

Hicke: I don't think so.

Forman: Oh, my God. It was a wonderful building. It was so much fun. And I can remember going through it even before I worked there, because I used to go up on weekends and go into the building and kind of go in and just befriend some of the research students in there and have fun talking with them. I just loved the building--the whole smell of it, and the whole thing was utterly fantastic.

I remember the old building that had this glass roof on it and all these steam pots, and all these guys were doing all this research. A professor named Rappaport had a greenhouse, and Rappaport's greenhouse was full of all these poppies. I guess he was doing studies on alkaloids. One of my jobs was to take all these poppies and get rid of them and clean out all these labs,

all this stuff. Threw half of the stuff away because it was so old. I just stocked my lab completely with all this stuff. I had so much fun. That was wonderful.

Hicke: How did you get that job?

Forman: My brother's girlfriend worked in the department there. She went to Berkeley, and she said, "During this summer we're going to tear down the old chem building, and there's going to be a ton of stuff to do. Are you interested?" Of course, I could hardly wait. So that was a good job.

And then the following summer I worked at Weibel [Champagne Vineyards] on the bottling line. I thought I was going to work in the winery. I wasn't able to because there just wasn't enough to do, so I ended up doing construction and work on the bottling line there. That didn't last very long.

Stony Hill Vineyard, 1967

Forman: It was the summer after that that I finally worked at Stony Hill. That was then starting to be significant. I was at Davis at that point.

Hicke: How did you get that job?

Forman: Again through Amerine. He'd [Fred McCrae] go to Amerine every year and say, "I want one of your graduate students or one of your students." He'd be interested in...so Amerine chose me again. I had a great time. I lived in their newly built barn. I was the first person who lived there. It has been used for thirty years since for their Mexican help, but I had the initial live-in. I moved up there and lived down there on the ranch and made the harvest of 1967.

It was extremely enlightening. A lot of things I learned there. He told me the importance of keeping everything clean and having sound fruit. He said, "If you have sound fruit"--

Hicke: Sound fruit?

Forman: Sound, good fruit. "You probably won't make bad wine." I learned that rule very early on. I was introduced to the barrel fermentation phenomenon, which was really not very much dealt with at Davis, so that was fascinating to me. And being introduced to

the production of Chardonnay and the way they did it at Stony Hill. It was a very hands-on, very traditional system.

Hicke: Traditional in the sense of the French--

Forman: Yes, very Burgundian system, really, except that he didn't use Burgundy barrels. He fermented in barrels. I think it has gotten way more traditional now, as are many of the wineries in California. But his approach to it was still, nevertheless, pretty classic. It was a wonderful way to start. Even though I had been taught all this technology at Davis, I was able to do some of the more traditional things along with my ability to point out to him and do various things that I had learned already as far as the technology goes. I helped him, and he helped me.

Hicke: Are you saying that technology and things that you learned at Davis were a little bit different from the way he was doing things?

Forman: Oh, definitely. And certainly influenced me, as did, finally, my ability to travel at an early age on Sterling's behalf. It influenced the way I make wine very, very seriously, and I think it had an effect on a few of the people who saw what I was doing and the way wines are being made now in California.

But anyway, we were all just starting here. He had been doing this for some time, but all the new wineries had just begun, and so they were ready to see what was going on. So that was good.

Robert Mondavi, 1968

Forman: Then going to work at Robert Mondavi the next summer was also a wonderful experience for me. Totally different. Much more technology there. A lot of big, fancy equipment that I otherwise hadn't worked with. Of course, Davis didn't have any pilot plants equipped the way they are now, so I had never seen this equipment. It was a wonderful chance to see how pumps worked and how the presses worked.

Hicke: Was he doing a lot of things that were different?

Forman: Bob was very automated. He was out there buying this equipment, and all the first stuff that had ever come into California. He was using these nice, stainless-steel tanks, which very few people had started using. He had gotten good presses, and he was

interested in centrifuges and all the sorts of things that nobody else had really paid much attention to, so he was one of the beginning technologists, really, as far as the California wine business.

I must say, I recall that it was a bit scattered around there. They were always doing too many things at one time. I learned that they were just full of energy and had lots of good ideas but that they probably took on too much at once, and so I learned those were some of the things I didn't want to do in the future, that I wanted to be more organized.

Hicke: More focused.

Forman: Yes, way more focused. So it taught me at a very early age what to and not to do.

Hicke: Was Warren Winiarski there then?

Forman: Warren was. I'll never forget Warren being on top of the tank and Warren said, "Well, now, Ric, we're going to pump these tanks over." I said, "That's great. I know in theory what it means, but how exactly is it done?" So he and I get up there, and he'd show me this and that and the other thing, and he had really only learned it the year before himself. There was a time that he had come to me and started asking me questions. I remember he used to want to borrow chemicals from me and asked me how this was done and asked me how that was done. So he wasn't really that knowledgeable himself about making wine. He was just really kind of an assistant, learning himself at Robert Mondavi.

Hicke: Was Zelma Long there?

Forman: Zelma? No, she came just a little bit later. It was Mike Mondavi, me, Warren, Brad Warner had just started there, and a few other guys. That was it. I remember Bob would come out and stand on the press with me and talk about what was going on and what I thought, and we'd taste wines. We had a wine that he bottled before that was a Sauvignon Blanc. He brought it down and said, "Ric, what's wrong with it?" He said, "It's all fizzy." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what's wrong with it, Bob. I think it's got some sugar in it and you didn't sterile-filter it," which was the problem. They were just learning there. They didn't have it down right yet. But they were very excited about the new Napa Valley wines.

III STERLING VINEYARDS, 1969-1978

Hiring On

Forman: So then I went back and finished with graduate school and had to make a decision at that point where to start working. The offer that had been made to me by Peter Newton, who was at that time contemplating building Sterling Vineyards, was by far to me the most exciting because it offered me the chance to really do it totally on my own, and I wasn't frightened of that. I didn't really want to go and work somewhere else with someone else. I really had, for some reason or another, enough confidence that I wanted to do it my way.

I never was--kind of all the way back into my childhood--I never really liked the Boy Scouts, I never really liked camp. I didn't like regimentation, and I didn't like people to have a program for me. I was really more interested in diving in myself and doing my own investigation and kind of running my own show.

Hicke: The views are so much better up there at Sterling! [laughs]

Forman: Yes, definitely. So I wasn't frightened by it. I guess they detected that, and they detected a degree of confidence.

Hicke: Had he talked to anybody else?

Forman: He must have. Yes, actually, they tried Philip Tonné, but they never got along. The winery wasn't built or anything, but Philip came aboard and was going to do some things with him, but they wore each other out, I think. I guess I was the next one, and I worked.

Designing the Plant

Forman: So I graduated in December, and they started off--

Hicke: This is '69.

Forman: In '69. We decided--for the rest of the winter I began doing research on equipment and traveled to all sorts of wineries and asked lots of questions.

Hicke: Give me an example. Where did you go?

Forman: Oh, I went down to the Paul Masson [Vineyard] plant to look at all the fancy equipment, I spent time with Martini [Winery], I went up to Parducci [Wine Cellars], I went to Gallo, I went to Beaulieu [Vineyard].

Hicke: Were all these people willing to--

Forman: Yes, they were all very friendly. Bill Fuller was extremely friendly, at Louis Martini, I remember. And then I would travel to the various equipment companies. I remember going to Missouri and looking at the Paul Muir stainless steel company, trying to get an idea of all this equipment. I don't know how really, honestly, I did it, because I didn't really know what I was doing.

Hicke: They don't teach you *that* in school.

Forman: No, but I realized I had to do it, and I asked a lot of questions and put a lot of ideas together, and I ended up designing this first plant--getting the equipment and ordering all the stuff that I needed.

Hicke: What were your objectives and goals?

Forman: This is kind of how it evolved: By far the most important thing that really happened was my association with Dick [Richard] Graff, who had come to Newton at the same time I had joined Newton and asked Newton if he would help sponsor Dick in a barrel and winery equipment company that he wanted to get started in conjunction with his running the very small, at that time, Chalone Vineyard. Peter thought that could be very advantageous. He liked Dick. Dick and I had gotten along. We had met each other at school.

And so Dick and I launched off in the spring. I actually got married to Joy, my wife--

Hicke: What was her maiden name?

Forman: Dale, D-a-l-e. So I married Joy, and we took off on a honeymoon to France. And then she came home after two weeks, and I stayed for an additional six weeks with Dick Graff, and we researched all of Europe. We went to all these equipment companies, all these barrel companies. We went into Italy and mostly France. Of course, I had practically never been out of California at this point, and so I was absolutely dazzled with the ability to go to Europe and then overwhelmed with what I learned. I mean, I went from this strict chemistry, technological background, other than what I learned at Stony Hill, to seeing what tradition really was. It just struck me, at age twenty-four, completely that that's what I wanted to do. I knew instantly that that was the way I wanted to make wine.

Hicke: What did you do about language?

Forman: I had French in high school, and I had a little bit of a knowledge of French. I'm much better now than I was then. I continued to study it. I'm not fluent, but I can kind of muddle through. But Dick and a purchasing agent for Sterling International, the parent company of Sterling--he spoke fluent French, and Dick spoke quite good French, so we had two French-speaking people on the trip, so it made it pretty easy.

Hicke: That covers French, but what about German? Did you go there?

Forman: Dick was not bad at German. He actually took us to this amazing--did you ever meet Dick?

Hicke: No.

Forman: Did anybody? They didn't get him before he died?

Hicke: No, we didn't get an oral history with him.

Forman: Oh, what a shame. He was without a doubt the most brilliant man in the industry. Utterly unbelievable.

Hicke: He was on the list, but we just didn't get to him.

Forman: What a shame. He was fabulous individual, unbelievably brilliant, genius-level brilliant, and very, very creative and very innovative and very energetic. Couldn't say enough about him. Incredible man. Awful, awful situation, that accidental death he had.

So we went over there, and we had this tremendous time. I came home with a total feeling then that yes, I was very happy that I had this technological background because it gave me a

foundation to know when I was getting over the edge or not with tradition, but the tradition was what I wanted to do, making wine.

Hicke: Can you explain why?

Forman: I don't know. It just had that charisma of something done and makes you feel that that's what you want to do. I knew I wanted to make wine, but then all of a sudden I realized that when I saw the tradition--both how it looked, how it felt, the hands-on abilities that allow--

Hicke: And the taste.

Forman: And, of course, the taste. I had been impressed with the taste. I wanted to create those things. I really wanted to create something classic. And so I came home. Of course, my first project was to make Chardonnay, which was the thing coming in first. I didn't have a winery set up yet, and I was frustrated. Equipment was on its way, and they were building all this stuff. Jack Davies at Schramsberg was kind enough and he knew Peter Newton well and said, "Look, you'll have to make it here. The grapes are getting ripe. What are you going to do?"

Hicke: Were these their own grapes?

Forman: Yes, they were Sterling's grapes. Sterling had planted vineyards before they had a notion to do a winery. They ran an extremely successful paper company, Peter Newton had, and this paper company, which was really a bulk-trading paper company--they buy paper in bulk and trade it all over the world, so it was kind of a brokerage business. He ultimately did then set up paper plants in England, but it was very successful. It was based in San Francisco--

Hicke: Just a second.

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Hicke: Okay.

Forman: It was very successful. It was based in San Francisco, and, you know, they were of an age and an affluence at that point where they all kind of wanted to get away, as everyone does if you can afford to. They had bought summer home--he and the two officers of the company bought summer homes in the Napa Valley and got involved in planting vineyards. It was fun for them. They were interested in it. And before they knew it, they realized that they could afford it, and they thought it would be fun to build a winery. And that's when I came onto the scene.

Hicke: Who were the other two partners?

Forman: There was actually only one partner. It was Mike Stone. He was a partner with Peter. And then Martin Waterfield was their comptroller, but he was very close to them both. He was not a partner, but he had a house up here as well. He actually was one of the men who was most influential in the exterior design of Sterling Vineyards. He, Dick Graff, and I basically designed and put Sterling together.

Hicke: When you built it up on that hill, did you envision the cable car to get up to it?

Forman: No, that was Martin's idea, totally Martin's idea. He was very clever, very clever indeed.

So anyway, backing up, we built a temporary plant at the bottom of the hill before we had any of the concept of what to do at the top.

First Crush at Schramsburg; Pioneering Barrel Fermentation

Hicke: Did you get the first crush in now?

Forman: Yes, we were starting. I tried to crush and couldn't get the full harvest, or the beginning of the harvest, at the initial plant, which was nothing more than a pad and some tanks sitting out in the open, with a crusher and so forth, and a trailer for an office. But it just wasn't complete in time for the Chardonnay, and so we went up to Schramsburg, where I had had a small relationship a year before because while I was at Robert Mondavi in '68, Sterling had grapes brought to Mondavi to be custom crushed. And then we put them in the new barrels, which I'll never forget, actually, putting into the tunnels previous to the '69 harvest.

I remember Joy and I--and we weren't even married yet--and a good friend of ours, Chick Hudson, had spent a weekend up there because the container of barrels had come in, and we laid all the cardboard down. I remember rolling them into the lower tunnel and being so excited that I had these brand-new, French barrels. Nobody had these barrels in the Napa Valley, and I had this new container of new French barrels. I'll never forget putting them into the tunnel. It was about the most exciting thing I could ever imagine. The charisma of going into a tunnel and having this wonderful new wood and knowing that I was going to put Chardonnay

and ferment it in there, which nobody else had ever even dreamed of doing, in new barrels. So I could hardly wait.

We did that actually for the red grapes that we had made at Mondavi, custom-crushed for Sterling's account. We put that wine into those barrels.

Hicke: Cabernet [Sauvignon]?

Forman: It was Cabernet and Merlot. We put that into those barrels. And then the new Chardonnay barrels came. Of course, the previous year they were also put into the barrels. They were not intended to go in with Schramsberg, but we had to because the grapes weren't ripe. And so--gosh!--I had these pumps all set up and everything, and I was going to use their crushing equipment. I'll never forget. I had all this brand-new hose, and I had to lay it from the little crushing and pressing area that Schramsberg had in the upper tunnels all the way down to the lower tunnel, where I was going to ferment the juice. They didn't do that sort of thing. They fermented in stainless up there. But since I wanted to ferment in barrels, I had to go to the lower tunnel.

I remember the morning the grapes came in, and before the grapes came in, I had all of this hose, this beautiful hose, all laid out from one tunnel to the next. And who comes along but this guy named Hugo. He was actually quite a town character at the time. You can see him in paintings around. But Hugo drove in, wearing these white coveralls, and he drove this old Chevy truck with a little trailer. He had all his equipment on it. Here he comes. He sees the hose across the road, thinks nothing of it, and drives right over my hose and dents it in about ten places and puts cracks in it.

Honest to God, I almost cried. I could have killed the guy. How could you do such a thing to me? I'm all set up, and you know how excited I was, and really my first harvest on my own. And he comes and wrecks it.

Hicke: What did you do?

Forman: Oh, we taped it up, and I was just sick. I had to buy new hose, and we made it work, but it was an awful start. So we pressed it, and I thought I knew what I was doing.

Hicke: I have a question before you get too far. You didn't tell me what kind of barrels these were.

Forman: These were classic Burgundy barrels, with the wooden hoop and all. It looked just as though you were in a Burgundy cellar. That's what was so exciting.

Hicke: Okay.

Forman: So we got the equipment going, and Jack helped me with the equipment and so forth. We pressed it and away the juice went, settled it. The next morning it went down into the barrels, and it fermented away, and it made just an absolutely wonderful wine. I remember Dick Graff coming up and tasting with me, and we both just smiled and thought, Well, this is it. This is what using these barrels and good grapes and fermentation and so forth does.

Hicke: Was that after three months?

Forman: This was after about a month. It was very good. And then I remember, at the time, the university was putting on a tasting. It was hosted at Robert Mondavi's. This was the following March. Of course, the rest of the harvest took place, and there's more perhaps that we can talk about, about that, and the rest of the red grapes came in, because the plant was ready at Sterling Vineyards.

But Chardonnay remained up there for some time, because it was fermented there. But we had a tasting in March of the new Chardonnay. There was a number of wineries that participated, the ones that were around--Freemark Abbey, Beaulieu, Christian Brothers, Martini, Heitz, and us, I guess--and Inglenook. They wanted to taste all the new wines. They thought it would be fascinating for everybody to bring these new wines and taste them.

I was making wine the way I felt that was traditional in Burgundy. I was leaving the wine with the lees, and I was doing things that no one would ever dream of doing: leaving the fermenting in barrels, which none of these people had done; new barrels on top of it all; leaving the wine with the lees; not racking it and getting off all these lees.

So I brought this wine, and my wine was the only one on the table that was cloudy. The rest of the wines had all, of course, as California was in those days: as quick as you could get them filtered, the better; and store them in oak uprights or stainless steel. And so we tasted them all, and I could hardly wait to have everybody taste this wine. Gosh, everybody's wine was so clear, and that made me a little nervous. And then all of sudden, everybody's wine was real polished and fruity, and mine had this sort of stale smell, because I had taken the sample out the day before, and I now know, but anytime a new wine has yeast or any

sediment in it, it doesn't travel well. It'll have this sort of stale, metallic sort of smell if it gets sunlight on it. So it had the sunlight on it, and I was just horrified. My wine looked awful. It totally destroyed my sense of security and that I had done the right thing. And I wondered then, "My God, have I stuck my neck out and done something absolutely awful?"

I called Dick, and Dick said, "Don't worry. I've been doing this at Chalone. It works. Don't worry. It's just that you took the wine full of sediment." I knew in theory that was it, but I had a heck of time convincing everybody else there. They all felt so sorry for me because the wine looked awful. You can imagine: my first wine [laughter].

Hicke: Ruined your day!

Forman: More than that! I came home, and my wife just said, "My God, what happened to you?" I said, "I don't know. I think I've blown it. I think I've really made something awful." But I stuck with my guns, I stuck with the traditional method, and eventually fined it, eventually bottled it, and I remember tasting it with all the rest of the wines, and it was so superior. The wine was absolutely elegant. It was just stunning. It was everything I wanted it to be. It truly had that French Burgundian taste.

Hicke: Oh, great!

Forman: So by hanging in there--and then I really had confidence. Other people tasted it and, of course, as we know, barrel fermentation now is being done. But Dick and I were the first people to do it and to really do it properly. It caught on.

Hicke: Documenting those events is one of the reasons we're here. Before we get too far, can you tell me: is there any particular reason that the people at Sterling planted Cabernet, Merlot, and Chardonnay?

Forman: Peter was English and really liked Bordeaux wine, number one. He liked European wine; that's what he grew up with. He saw that Chardonnay was catching on. He knew what Fred McCrae had been doing, and he was a visionary and realized that it would catch on. He knew Cabernet was what the Valley did well with. Obviously, Beaulieu had set the pattern with that, with making world-class Cabernet ever since the forties. So Cabernet was a natural.

An Early Merlot Varietal

Forman: But he went further and said, "You know, I think Merlot would be a good grape." I wanted to agree with him. I was enthusiastic about it, particularly since I had spent time in Pomerol on the first visit. So I was very much in agreement with him. We even, at his encouragement, tried to bottle one early on, 1969.

Hicke: A Merlot varietal?

Forman: Yes, a varietal. Louis Martini had done one in '67.

Hicke: I just read--I think it was in this morning's paper--that you had the second one.

Forman: Yes, so I had had the second one. It was made in a different style. It was made in my traditional Bordelaise--as I was traditional Burgundian in Chardonnay, I was Bordelaise in my thinking as far as how Cabernet, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc were produced. We had Merlot and Cabernet. We later added Franc and even later, Petit Verdot, at my encouragement. But Merlot was the most innovative, of course, at the time because nobody was even thinking about Merlot; it was all Cabernet here.

Peter said, "They make wonderful wines in Pomerol and St. Emilion. Why don't we bottle some Merlot ourselves? People might be fascinated." I sort of resisted, and then I said, "No, I guess you're right. We will, and I'll try to do something special with it." I did. The '69 was all right, but the '70 was really quite wonderful, and from then on, it turned into an incredibly good wine. It had uniqueness. People thought it could stand on its own. I made a very stylish wine from it.

I remember going into 1978, encouraging [Dan] Duckhorn to get involved with it. Took him to Bordeaux and introduced him to the people. And he really started popularizing Merlot more than, I would say, Sterling did. Then, of course, we know where that has gone at this point.

Hicke: Yes. Well, he made only Merlot for--

Forman: For a while, and that was kind of my encouragement, telling him to do so. Christian Moueix actually went to Davis with me. I wasn't really close to him, but I knew him, and I knew him, and I knew he was an important figure in the Bordeaux region, and became, of course, much more aware of it once I traveled to Bordeaux and visited him now and then. He was kind enough to allow me to spend time in some of his cellars, and so I learned the techniques of

racking and brought home for the first time also the Bordeaux system of racking and fining in barrels and racking out of the head of the barrel, using air pressure. Of course, everybody thought, again, I was nuts--just as they thought I was nuts fermenting Chardonnay in barrels.

But, again, now it's all caught on, and that's, of course, the only way people make classic Cabernet in California now. But I remember even having to convince Dick that this was the way it needed to be done. I remember bringing all of his crews from the various wineries that he had at that point, with the Chalone group. I'd bring them into the cellars and train them how to rack out of the head of the barrel and how to do all the techniques that I learned.

Hicke: Did you actually learn that?

Forman: I was able to work in the cellar at Chateau Trotanoy, Moueix's cellar. The guys there really showed me exactly how to do it all. They would allow me to do it, and so I learned the physical way of doing it. So it was wonderful. I'd bring these barrels home and drive holes in the head of them. Everybody thought I was crazy to rack a barrel that way. What in the world was I doing, racking that wine with air pressure and coming out of the head of the barrel, doing all these crazy things?

But it made a difference. It made a subtle difference, but it was a difference. It just added that little touch of refinement to what I already felt was important, as blending Cabernet and Merlot and Cabernet Franc and eventually Petit Verdot. I was convinced that a Bordeaux-style wine could be made and even made to a more high degree of refinement than had been done previously in California, by using some of these techniques.

Hicke: Okay. I think we went by these too fast. Could you elaborate on these techniques one by one, and explain how they were done?

Forman: Let's take a break for a minute.

Hicke: Okay.

Travel and Research in Europe

[Interview 2: February 25, 1999] ##

Hicke: This is February 25th now. We're on our second interview.

Forman: You made some notes, and I wanted to go back and try to elaborate on some of those topics. I'm hoping that whoever transcribes this is able to pick it apart--like throw them all out on a sheet and then put the like parts together, because we've been a little scattered. I would certainly like to see this whole thing collated, so to speak, so that we have a uniformity of progression, I guess, from where we started through my life as a winemaker.

Hicke: The transcriber will transcribe what's on the tape. We can rearrange some of it if you like.

Forman: Yes, that's fine, that's fine. I've done this enough times, and when somebody does it verbatim or they do kind of the flow as it came, it's very disjointed. I don't know whether there was a book or there was something that was done that way, and I was really upset about it, that they didn't take the time to at least get it back to me and let me say that I didn't want to have it sound exactly like that. You almost sound illiterate sometimes if they take it verbatim--because we don't talk the way we write.

Hicke: That's what I was just going to say. You sound perfectly fine, but when you look at it in writing--

Forman: No, no, it doesn't make sense, no no. Conversations don't go the way one writes.

Hicke: Yes. Okay, I'll just kind of let you go your own.

Forman: We made a note there.

Hicke: Yes, we wanted to go back to early days at Sterling and talk about your trips to Europe.

Forman: What I saw in Europe, exactly. Obviously, going to school and making the decision to get into the Department of Enology and Viticulture and see it through all the way to graduate school was an important phase and decision in my life. It set me into one direction which was obviously very important. So that was an important decision for me.

The next most important thing that guided me was going to Europe, and so I think it's probably not just enough to say that it dazzled me, but why. I guess it has a lot to do with aesthetics, as much as it does practicality of the matter. Going there and seeing the way the vineyards, for instance, were so neatly laid out to me was very, very meaningful. I liked the symmetry of it all. I was astounded at the thought that the French, who are obviously very economy-minded people, would go to

the effort of spending that tremendous amount of money in the close spacing and the elaborate trellis systems and the massive amount of care that it takes to tend these vines.

You see, in the normal course of things in those days in California on an acre of land we had 450 vines. You looked at a comparable plot of land in Europe, and we had 2,000 to 3,000 vines. That's a big multiplier. I now know because I came back with this notion as well. I planted probably the first close spacing at Sterling because of that and because I was fascinated with it and fiddled with it for years. Of course, now, again, the whole Valley is going to this close spacing.

Hicke: Did you look at the soil?

Forman: Well, yes. Also, I was absolutely enthralled, particularly in Bordeaux and in Burgundy, with the soil types and where they were planting the land. You'd go, for instance, from Bordeaux city up through the Médoc, and you'd see this rather nice, low-lying land. It would be not planted in grapes, in a similar manner that we would see in California or in the Napa Valley where it *would* be planted in grapes. They only planted areas that were very well drained, and when they were well drained they also had extremely austere soils--these gravelly--looked like river beds. I thought, Wow, this is interesting, this notion of planting on the austere, not the rich soils. That has to have something to do with it.

Hicke: There's even a winery there called Little Pebbles--I've forgotten what it is in French.

Forman: Yes, Ducru-Beaucaillou, the Cru of the Beautiful Pebbles, exactly. Ducru has a wonderful plot. So I got to know Bordeaux very well, and I realized that the grandes crus were always on these knolls and always had sort of watersheds that even the knoll itself could drain into it. These were important factors.

It was understood, too, as well, that the close spacings and the no-irrigation there were coupled with the fact that they got more rain. That was just about the time that actually in California we were able to do drip irrigation so that that was a factor that was going to come into play here.

But getting back to what my impressions were--the soil types and the beautiful slopes of Burgundy were down in the palm of the slope, where the soil was both well drained and somewhat rich--was where all the grande crus were, so I was fascinated with this and realized that--[pause]

Hicke: Did you take notes?

Forman: Oh, yes. I have notes and notes and notes I'd write and write, kind of summaries of each trip, at the end of them all. I don't know where they are now, in the archives at Sterling, I suppose.

Then the next thing that I think impressed me was just the charm of the old buildings, the old stone buildings. I really liked that. It just had a feel of solidarity and a feel of longevity and of having been there for a long time. It was a tremendous statement to me that wine was important, that it was a tradition, that it was part of their heritage and they were proud of it, and that they really revered it. It was just this national sort of symbol of France and the other countries surrounding it that were involved in wines. So the buildings impressed me. I liked it. I liked the way they were laid out. I liked the charm of them all. I liked just their feel.

Hicke: Are you talking about Bordeaux or Burgundy?

Forman: Both. I loved the little villages in Burgundy. I thought they were very, very neat--the way they were tiny and the winding streets, and under every house was a cellar, and every little garage had a press in it, and that they made these small batches and they made them totally by hand. They lived there. They lived on top of where they worked, which is, of course, what I came back finally to do here.

So this whole family feel, this whole approach of living the business, basically, was so different than what I had come away from at school with chemistry labs and research and technical papers and seeing big wineries that have big equipment and kind of corporate-run mentalities in California. So that obviously was just a total opposite of what I expected, and I liked it, and I kept thinking about it. It was one of these charismatic feels that you came back wanting to be part of.

In the cellars, I loved the barrels, which I otherwise had become a little familiar with, having worked at Stony Hill previously, but he had old whiskey barrels and a hodge-podge of things and no French oak and disjointed things that had been there for twenty years before, and I think some of them still are!

So these beautifully made barrels and the fact that many of them were new and the beautiful way they'd be laid out, particularly in the chais of Bordeaux were these long rows of barrels with glass bungs on them, and their hand-done equipment. I remember watching some of the wines being racked. In those days--of course, this was thirty-some years ago--they'd have these hand pumps similar to this one sitting up in the corner there? Do you see that thing?

Hicke: Oh, yes.

Forman: I bought that there. That was actually a brand-new pump. Those would add air pressure to the barrel, and the wine would be racked from barrel to barrel. God, I was just fascinated with the hand-tending of these things. It again showed the care of the product and the really closeness that they felt. And that impressed me.

And I looked at these big oak fermenters, and I looked at how they were kept and the various equipment that was so different from the equipment that we have here. The whole package eventually created a new philosophy for me, which otherwise wasn't really well formed anyway, having just come from school. I would have thought that I would have come away with this chemistry, technological, let's go and make the better wine through technology from school because that's all I had known.

And bang! I almost forgot that. It was always in the back of my mind, and I think it's good that it is, because that's something you never get if you don't go to school--you wouldn't get that in the field. So I had this background that gave me security in knowing why things happen, and if there was something wrong, I had the tools to solve the problems and get in and fix it.

Pioneering Winemaking Techniques; Importance of Barrel Fermentation

Forman: But I knew I didn't want to make wine that way. I knew I wanted to make wine the way it had been made in Europe, even though nobody here did it, really, in any true form. And I wanted to try to make a statement here with what we had, with our fruit. Peter Newton at Sterling was thrilled with the idea that I wanted to do that because that was his feeling and the reason wine was a romancing subject to him, and so he said, "Go for it. Do what you need to do."

And then Dick Graff came along and helped me, because he had the same feelings, and he was dedicated to trying to make Chalone into a Burgundian winery. So the two of us did a lot of research together, bought a lot of barrels, studied what they did with barrels. It wasn't just to get barrels but once you had a barrel, what did you do? We brought a number of them in, sold them to a number of wineries, and they always misused them. They didn't get it.

There are certain ways that barrels should be cleaned; there are certain ways that one needed to go into the barrels. The first barrels that were introduced, basically by Dick Graff's company and Sterling and me, were almost always abused because they came with the thought of Yes, this is something we have to change, but they used old technological sort of mentality with the barrels. They'd take fresh wine and filter it, and then put it into these brand-new barrels, and the wine would turn out tasting like sawdust, it was so strong.

They couldn't get the feeling of putting fresh juice into barrels and letting it ferment, leaving it with the lees--this wanting to be clean in California, or get the thing processed. This processing mentality in the wine business had to change. So we slowly talked to people that we sold barrels to and said, "Look, you've got to do this; you've got to that." We ourselves were continuing to experiment with it. We'd go a little bit further each year and take the step one bit more.

It made a dramatic change in what California Chardonnay and California Cabernet began looking like. All of a sudden, there was this extra bit of spice, this extra bit of richness, this intrigue that had not existed before. So we had the fruit, and, of course, the fruit is number one. I suspect and I've always said that 75 percent of the quality of wine is really from the fruit and the vineyard in which it is grown. This 25 percent is what we can do in the winery to take it a step further or to guide it and to make what we're really interested in making. It can be straight, simple wine or it can be fancy wine or whatever.

Hicke: Before you get too far, let's keep in mind--I know you took other trips to Europe and taught your philosophy and spread it around. At some point, let's go into that.

Forman: That is true, right. Where were we? What were some of the other subjects I wanted to talk about?

1976 Trip with Dan Duckhorn; Other Trips

Hicke: Do you want to talk about your trips with other people?

Forman: I could, sure. Probably the most important trip that I have in mind right now that I took was with Dan Duckhorn. He had expressed interest. We were friends, simply because of living in the same valley and running into each other. He had a really keen desire to make wine. He had gotten into the bench graft business

coming from the banking business, of all things. The bench graft business was interesting to him, the viticulture side was interesting. But he wanted to take it a step further for himself as well and wanted to investigate the possibilities in making wine.

And so he asked me if I would give him some guidance. He was fascinated with the Merlot that we were making at Sterling and felt that it had a place in California's wine portfolio, if you will. He said, "Look, take me to Pomerol. You seem to be the one that has gone more than anyone else that I know in the Valley, and you're comfortable with it. You like it, you understand the Bordeaux philosophy maybe more than anyone at this point, and would you take me and show me what's going on?"

I thought that sounded like fun, so we took off. This was probably in 1976, I would think. I lined up a number of visits in Bordeaux. We actually went to Burgundy as well, but Bordeaux is the one that really stuck with him. Had a lot of fun. He was just fascinated in the very same way that I was. The buildings were very interesting, and I think if you look at his building now, he's done a lot to sort of capture that low chai, Bordeaux-facade look.

He immediately grasped the notion that thin-stave, Bordeaux barrels were important, as opposed to just what everybody really wanted, being these thick-staved--when Californians wanted barrels, they couldn't get away from the thicker-staved sort of bourbon barrels that they'd been using, and so they always wound up with what the Bordelaise called export barrels.

I told a number of people, including Dan--and I think he was one of the first to get it--that the thin-staved barrel was more important, because in making the thin-staved barrel they didn't have to put as much heat with the barrel, and there was a total different flavor of toast. It was what we really liked when we tasted these French wines, this flavor of violets.

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Forman: So there were little, subtle things like that. He came away realizing the same things I did when I started: that there was a tremendous tradition there and there were ways of doing things that if you paid attention to it, could make a big difference. And so he came back and started producing Merlot in 1978 from grapes from Three Palms [Vineyard], which was quite a miracle that we were able to get for him, because Three Palms was controlled at that point by Sterling. It still is, for that matter.

I'm not sure how we did it, but they allowed him to buy a small bit of Merlot--

Hicke: Sterling did?

Forman: Sterling did.

Hicke: They didn't have a contract?

Forman: They had a contract for life for it. Newton secured that very carefully. I honestly can't remember the details of how that came about, but he was able to get it. The '78 Merlot was an instant success. He did it properly. I guided him a bit. Phil Baxter at the time was helping him as well. The team of us made a very impressive wine, and he continued to do so and does right up to today with that adherence to Bordeaux tradition, in the same manner that I did.

Hicke: Anybody else? Did you finish with that?

Forman: Yes, I think I said enough. No, actually, I generally went by myself. The other person I've influenced in a massive way--I guess I've done it so often that I don't even recall it, but it seems like part of what I've done--but David Abreu is a very close friend of mine. He's probably the premiere viticulturist now in the Napa Valley as far as premium grapes are concerned. He was a native of St. Helena and really had no formal education per se but was interested in farming and started with--as he came out of the Vietnam affair--out of high school, Vietnam, and then came back and wanted to do farming and farmed for the H&W Ranch.

And realized that he liked it, was associated with Chuck Wagner at Caymus [Vineyards] and enjoyed his relationship there and the ability to learn from the farming that they'd been doing, and finally decided that he wanted to get into farming on his own and farm for other people as a business--vineyard management company, if you like. So he asked me what I thought about it, because I had become acquainted with him--at this point, it was about 1980--at Newton. I said, "Yes, I'll help you out."

I agreed to join him as a partner in his first venture, which was running the Inglenook Vineyard. And then, about the same time, I said, "You know, David, we have to go to Europe and I'll show you some of the things I've seen. I think you'll be fascinated with it." He was indeed just enthralled with the whole thing. The same concept that hit me in the early seventies hit him immediately, this notion of the French taking the vines and making them literally behave in an entirely different way than we do. This very, very close attention to training, to trellising,

to vine care, and the whole effect on the fruit and the way one deals with the land was impressive to him, and he really, I think, was determined to come back and see if we couldn't put some of these notions to work in the Napa Valley.

I helped him do so and guided him in it. David is a very astute man, and he learns quickly. He's very fastidious, and he developed a whole system of vineyard management around these trips and around our knowledge that we would gather. We would go and spend hours in the vineyards, particularly Bordeaux, and take meticulous notes and take roll upon roll of pictures and talk to the farm workers.

I was, at least at this point--I'm now capable enough, I guess, in speaking French that I can get some stuff out of these workers. And we found that it was probably almost more fun to talk to the workers than to talk to the owners because they'd tell us different things. We weeded out all of the whys and wherefors of how these vineyards functioned. For eight, ten years now we've been doing this. We've gained a great deal of knowledge.

Hicke: Do you go every year?

Forman: Every year. I went three times last year. So I spend a lot of time in Europe. It's very important. It's very influential on me and how I maintain my philosophy of winemaking.

Hicke: You learn something new every time?

Forman: If you don't learn, you reinforce the old things, and you come back with a strong conviction to continue with what you're doing.

Hedging

Hicke: I'd like to ask a question I've wondered about. In Europe they do something I think they call hedging? They clip the vines right across the top.

Forman: We now own a machine that we bought in Pomerol that does it. All of our vineyards are hedged. When you come through, it looks very much like topiary bushes. They're absolutely perfectly hedged. What we're trying to maintain is a meter of growth between the fruiting bud and the top of the canes, and we want about thirteen inches wide, thirteen-inch density canopy, one meter high. So it comes along and hedges the sides and hedges the top. By so doing, we get just the amount of light necessary. What you're really

after on fruit is dappled light. You want about a leaf and a half, so to speak, of maximum shade over the fruit, so you'd like bits of light hitting the fruit at all times and hitting all of the leaf surfaces.

This idea of this massive, lush canopy that we've had in many California vineyards is absolutely dead wrong. This is the reason the vineyards are so carefully tended and so carefully hedged and have these thin, vertical trellises. It's because they realize that light is the element that's needed for vines to function. They have leaves, and the leaves can't function without light, and so every effort is made to get all the leaf surface exposed to the maximum amount of light. By so doing, you concentrate its effort, and therefore the components of the fruit and the health of the vine.

That's what it's all about, really.

Hicke: Has machine hedging now become more prevalent?

Forman: Oh, yes, the machines are coming in here as fast as they can get them in. You'll drive up this Valley, and every close vineyard now is properly hedged. I think we brought the first machine in, but there are a number of them now. Unfortunately, a lot of it on terraces and so forth still has to be done by hand, but all of these vertical trellises are hedged. It's just a matter of practice. Usually three times a year.

Hicke: I haven't been up here in the summertime for a while.

Forman: I'd love to take you and show you the Torvillos vineyard we have. You'd be amazed at how beautiful it is. It looks absolutely like Pomerol. It's a dead copy of every single system, and it's a spectacular vineyard, I must say [chuckling]. I think it's the highest-priced fruit in the Valley, too. David and I own it concurrently. It's just on the ridge above me here.

Hicke: Where the flag is?

Forman: It's a little beyond that. It's twenty acres. We sell the fruit for five thousand dollars a ton.

Hicke: That's amazing!

Forman: It's unbelievable.

Hicke: What's planted?

Forman: Cabernet, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot--all French clones. We've taken it, so to speak, to the next level, I think, both David and I.

David Abreu's Farming Business

Forman: And David--getting back to people I've taken to Europe--just as Dan is very astute, David is very astute. He's a very keen observer and a quick learner, and he's very fastidious and comes back and just doggedly adheres to the principles that he believes in and has created an unbelievably successful business around it, and now farms what I call all the society vineyards. He has the Araujos, the Harlan Estate, Viader Vineyards, Staglin Family Vineyard, Cogan--every fancy wine on the table now, pretty much, David farms.

Hicke: Araujo, did you say?

Forman: Yes.

Hicke: I had some Araujo Viognier last night, by the glass, here, and it was marvelous.

Forman: I don't happen to like the variety, but I'm sure if they made it, it's good.

Hicke: I never liked it before, but this was excellent.

Forman: Well, he farms that land in a very, very grand manner. It's very, very expensive. That's another thing about him. I mean, anything that's good I guess is costly. He's expensive, but what you get is what you want, usually. As I said, 75 percent of the quality of these wines comes from the vineyard. Most of it's from the soil and the exposure, and then the vineyard viticulturist tends them, and if he does it properly, he gets the maximum out of the soil and delivers this product to a winery, and there you are: 75 percent of the quality is already in your lap. It's up to you to take it and not ruin it, and to put perhaps your 25 percent of additional effort into it to produce something we hope is very special.

Hicke: I'm gathering that this is another thing you learned in France--you've been saying all along that this is one of the things you learned in France.

Forman: Oh, the fruit is so critical. You see this highly delineated area in France, where one plot has its own appellation and has its own sort of level of quality. The stamp is put on it and guaranteed by the government, and the rules are made. You say why? Do they do this just because--is it political? To some extent it was, particularly in Bordeaux, where they arrived at this hierarchy of classification. It was done really on price in 1855, and the expensive wines were the premiere First Growth and on down through the Fifth Growth, according to price. But price really, in those days, by and large related to quality as well, and the quality related to soil, so it does really relate to how good is the piece of ground.

We're starting to do that here in the Napa Valley. You see vineyard-designation labels. We have now zones of appellations--the Howell Mountain appellation, the Spring Mountain, the Stag's Leap and so forth, the St. Helena appellation. So we're beginning to realize that certain areas produce quality which is distinct and identifiable and is worthy of recognizing, just as the French do, but we haven't even come close to the detail that they spend, looking at it.

Hicke: Is that maybe because they have such small amounts of land to work with?

Forman: They have more than we do. They have a lot more land than we do. It's just that they've been doing it for 300 years and paying attention to it. And I think they take, frankly, their viticulture areas more seriously than we do. The whole community in Europe, once they have a viticultural area which they've known they've had for 200 or 300 or more years, the whole community respects it and gets behind it and doesn't try to out-zone it or change it for the whim of whomever happens to come and live there, the way we're doing in all of our nice regions in St. Helena.

You mentioned coming up here, why we can't cut trees down anymore. There are people who come from other regions and think this is a wonderful Valley. They love the notion that it's a wonderful Valley mainly because it has grapes, but they don't want the grapes; they only want the notion, and they don't realize that you have to support the grapes and that you have to give precedence to the grapes. They are what made the region, they are what we stand for, and they should not be hindered.

And so we have developers who see plots that would make lovely homes and people coming up and thinking, "Oh, I'm in the Napa Valley. This is great. Don't plant any more vineyards. Don't take any trees down. I love it, but I love to be in the Valley." This notion doesn't even come close to being in effect

in Europe. They highly covet their land. They realize that it's for grapes, and grapes come first. Unfortunately, they don't around here, and we're going to run into a little bit of trouble. But here we are.

Hicke: We'll want to get into it a little more later.

Forman: Exactly. So that's traveling to Europe and what it really did for me and the intensity with which it guided me and formed a philosophy.

I came to Sterling after having had a couple of what the French I guess would call *stages*, training sessions at Stony Hill and Robert Mondavi.

First Wines of Sterling

Hicke: Now I think we wanted to go back a little over the first harvest and some of those days at Sterling.

Forman: At Sterling, yes.

Hicke: Are we there yet?

Forman: Oh, I think we could get there, yes. We've seen how I really formed my thought process about how I wanted to make wine. And, of course, clearly it sounds and feels to me now like it's always been there and, like, what else? But in those days it was the beginning of a thought process, and so I wasn't totally sure of myself, although I wanted to do it, and I did it. I had to learn going along. I didn't just automatically launch into this notion that I wanted to make classic, European-style wine and there we go, I went at it.

I stumbled and tried various things and tried to see which of them was really very adaptable to our type of fruit and so forth. Made mistakes, clearly, in the beginning. The first harvest was both very exciting and very frightening for me. I had never really been left on my own to do this, and I realized we had spent a great deal of money, totally at my suggestion, and that the owners didn't know how to make wine either but were completely trusting in me.

Hicke: Can you describe what a typical harvest day was like that first time? How you felt?

Forman: I was nervous from the point I woke up until I went to bed, trying to think about what I should do next. I would plan my whole day out before I got up and go through each step and figure out what I needed to do and hope that I had all the equipment necessary and all of the pieces in line.

I think I learned this technique of planning ahead while I was at school. I had this research project in graduate school. I got into a habit--it was not a very elaborate research project, really. It wasn't really very sophisticated, but I had to invent it and dream it up and guide it. So I learned the habit of every morning before I got up, I'd spend whatever it took to completely think through what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it and what I was going to need to do it, so that when I started I had this preparedness.

That habit carried over into how I ran Sterling, and it has carried over all my career. I'm able to get a lot done and get it done efficiently and not waste a lot of time, and seemingly [chuckling], for some reason or other, I always manage to get an amazing amount done without having had to stay up all night or work too long. I get things done quickly and efficiently by planning ahead, I think is really what it amounts to.

So I planned ahead, and I had all this equipment, and I actually did a fairly good job, surprisingly, without having had much experience before, other than at Stony Hill and Robert Mondavi, because everything was there, everything worked, everything functioned the way it was supposed to.

I'm trying to remember some of the things we did. I remember all the grapes we had to take, because we had Cabernet and Chardonnay, which they planted new, but we had old vineyards which ultimately we'd rip out, but we had to deal with the wine. Remember, I mentioned to you yesterday there's one called Pinot La Fata. There was a guy named La Fata, which is quite a funny name. There's actually a street in town named after him. Evidently, he was a botanist. He cloned grapes. One of the grapes he cloned, he named after himself. It was Pinot La Fata, and it was this white grape, which is a very funny grape. To me, it was sort of like Sauvignon Vert. It was a very loose-clustered, pale-colored grape with almost no flavor. Anyway, we had to make about ten tons of it. I remember fermenting it and wondering what in the world I was going to do with it. It had no flavor at all.

Then we had some French Columbard which we had to make. I made a whole batch of that. And we had Chenin Blanc that I had to make, and I made a whole batch of that. None of these wines I really knew what to do with.

Hicke: That wasn't quite your style, was it!

Forman: No, I just fermented them in stainless, and they came out--I could never seem to make a Chenin Blanc that had much flavor; I don't know why. Maybe it was the fact that I really didn't like fermenting white wine in stainless. It went against what I really wanted to do, and I just didn't see the notion of wasting barrel space and expensive barrels on these. We had the grapes; we had to do something with them. So maybe my heart wasn't into it, but I never made really very good wine.

I remember having to sell it all in bulk. We took it down to Hans Kornell. He wanted me to bring it down and put it into a tank. God, I'd never figured out how to close one of these wooden doors on a tank, so old Hans says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm trying to close the door." He said, "But you haven't put Seal-Tight around the door." I remember old Hans showing me how to prepare the door.

Then I get it done, and here wine comes from the tank truck in there, and he says, "What in the world are you doing? This wine is dirty." "What do you mean it's dirty? It's new wine." He said, "I don't take wine in this cellar with yeast in it." He said, "What are you doing to me?" I said, "Oh, my God, Hans, I didn't know it would bother you." He said, "I only buy wine that's been filtered."

So I get into a big, big hassle with him. Hans was a very tough character, and boy, he was not pleased with me. I'd filled his whole tank up with this cloudy, yeasty wine. That didn't please him at all. But we got over it.

[tape interruption]

Hicke: You were just delivering some wine to Kornell.

Forman: Oh, yes, we did that. Some of the other wines I made--you know, the '69, the Chardonnay we mentioned I had to make up at Schramsberg, and that we've been through that quite thoroughly. That was very exciting, and it ended up turning out to be really quite a nice wine. So all of the ideas worked. From that point on, I wouldn't dream of making a white wine any other way than in barrels. I never have, to this day, thirty-one years later. I've never made any white wine in anything other than fermenting it in barrels. It obviously has stuck with me. I think the notion, as we said yesterday, has caught on, and a few other people believe it works as well.

Hicke: What else did you make at Sterling?

Forman: At Sterling in that same year, 1969, we made all these other goofy white wines, as I mentioned, and those were fermented in stainless, but the last to be for me. And then we made Cabernet, of course, and Merlot. We also had some Pinot Noir, which was growing at Three Palms, of all places, the absolute worst place in the world for Pinot Noir to be grown.

Hicke: Where is it?

Forman: Three Palms Vineyard is just on one of the last bends of the Silverado Trail as it comes around to Dunaweal Lane. It's just in back of Sterling. It's a unique swathe of ground, having been sort of criss-crossed over the eons with Selby Creek, and so it's very rocky. It's rocky in the same way that Rhone soils are rocky. It has all these round, river-run, hard rocks, and very gravelly, well-drained soil. It's a super place for grapes, but it's for grapes that require heat and exposure, not sensitive grapes like Pinot Noir. The Cabernet and Merlot and Franc and so forth do marvelously there, but the Pinot Noir was just a joke. I don't know why they ever planted it. That came before me.

So I tried to make Pinot Noir at Sterling. Actually, in 1971 we made quite a unique one. It was a California-style Pinot Noir. It's still very viable. It's unbelievable. It was tannic, dark, and uniquely spicy and flavorful. It worked. I wouldn't call it Burgundian Pinot Noir, but it worked.

Hicke: And that was from that vineyard?

Hicke: Yes, yes. But that only happened occasionally.

Hicke: It just goes to show the winemaker can do a few things.

Chardonnay sans Malolactic

Forman: A few, I suppose. I suppose. But the real excitement there was these Chardonnays that I was able to produce, actually, also from an area that really isn't very good for Chardonnay, the Calistoga area, but this treatment in barrels and sur lees and so forth was making very good wine.

I will mention, as long as we're talking about Chardonnay again, that I early on deviated in one very--I suppose you could say strict way from the Burgundian method. Of course, all Chardonnay in Burgundy goes through a malolactic fermentation. While I was being traditional in every manner--from the crushing

and using settled, free-run juice to putting juice directly into barrels, yeasting in barrels, leaving the wine with the lees for up to five or six months in barrels and stirring the barrels--the only thing I decided I didn't want to do was malolactic.

Dick Graff was a real proponent of that. He said that no malo was important. I think in his area in Chalone, it worked because they had high acidity. But I just didn't feel that Chardonnay, particularly grown in Calistoga, had enough acidity to produce a balanced wine if the malo took place. So I always inhibited the malo, using reasonable amounts of sulfur dioxide. I think my wines--well, even today some of them are still viable. I think they were then and still are better in this region for it.

I think the malo has been taken to extremes. It sort of was turned into a buzz word by the wine writers and the notion of having malo on Chardonnay was the thing to do. In only very few places in California, I think, is it successful. I think it turns the wine into an unbalanced product. It makes it overly sweet, with lazy flavors. It doesn't have that distinct, crisp, mineral-y quality that you like in a white wine. And the wines practically don't age at all. Most California Chardonnay are eighteen-month wines.

The no-malo wines I made at Sterling and the no-malo wines I made at Newton and the no-malo wines I'm still making, no matter where the grapes are grown, seem to have tremendous ability to age. I mean, they're ten-year wines easily, in many cases, sometimes more. They do develop this wonderful crème brûlée character that you get from malo, but get it with age rather than from the malo, and they retain the acidity, which gives it the mineral quality that you're after.

I really like white wine with acidity. Probably the only Chardonnay that I really am fond of are Chardonnays made in Chablis because they have this nice mineral-y quality. I realize that the California market wants something a little richer, so I do pick the grapes quite ripe. Did at Sterling, did at Newton, have here. And so I get a very rich wine, but this no-malo has at least the wine balanced with acidity, and it manages to handle the oak much better. It certainly ages more gracefully and produces, I think, a final product which has a lot more intrigue.

Actually, I wrote quite a long paper on the subject for the Napa Valley Wine Library. I went into a lot of depth about why you do, why you don't. Somebody was interested in really learning about why, I think, so they could look up--

Hicke: About what date was it?

Forman: I have it in there, and I'll give it to you. It was kind of a neat article. It really went top to bottom on malolactic with Chardonnay in Europe and California and why it was done, in the same manner we're doing it as an interview, but it turned out pretty well. So I've really been very emphatic about staying with that conviction, that malo is no good for the region that we're in here. I think, actually, the public is now getting a little tired of these massively heavy, oaky, sweet Chardonnays. They're starting to say, "You know, I like these wines that don't have malo." It's coming back in fashion, you know? Don't throw your bell bottoms away.

Hicke: [chuckling].

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Forman: I may have started something with the sweet Chardonnay as well. Jess Jackson of Kendall-Jackson [Vineyards] came to me right in the midst of when I was having trouble with my partnership with Newton. Just as I bailed out of the partnership, he asked me to come and consult for him. This was some of the first wines he had made up in Lake County, and he was just getting started with Kendall-Jackson wines. He said, "Ric, I've got some problems. I know you have some problems with your partnership, which I may be able to help you with"--because he was an attorney--and he said, "I have some problems with the wine that maybe you could help me with. Could we trade thoughts?"

I said, "Sure, Jess, I'd be happy to." So I went up there and discovered that he had tank after tank of Chardonnay that had stuck during its fermentation. It was left sweet. I did the best to retrieve as much of it as I could. But in the end, he had let it go for so long that we were unable to get a lot of the wine to go to dryness, and so I encouraged him to buy some wine from Tepiscay, which turned out to be very good wine and so good that he ended up buying the vineyards.

We finally had to make some blends. I told him, "You know, I don't think, Jess, that the public is going to mind this. Why don't you go ahead and blend some of this sweet wine in there? It's not my style, by any means. I can't stand it. But," I said, "I think the public is going to like it." Wouldn't you know it, they flipped over it. It became the new thing, this sort of subliminal sweetness in Chardonnay, and people just went crazy. It was almost the same thing that happened with Bob Trinchero's White Zinfandel. They flipped over it, and it became the new wave in Chardonnay, and Kendall-Jackson was at the forefront with it.

Hicke: I've heard it said that people like to say they like dry wine but actually--

Forman: Well, they do. Californians--they say warm and want cold; they want dry but really have sweet. We're a soda-pop-bred society, and it's tough for us to get into the real wine-drinking habits and styles that the Europeans have because we haven't been brought up that way.

Hicke: It takes some education.

Forman: Yes, it really does. You really have to know wine to like it. The more you know wine, the less you want these sweet, heavy wines. You want something to reach for and something that has intrigue and something that doesn't assault you when you drink it. Bigger is not better.

Hicke: It's an intellectual challenge.

Forman: It definitely is, and unfortunately, the current wine writers are promoting again this massive character, and it really saddens me. It's something I think we could end with, but I'm deeply worried about--but that's a subject to wrap up with, I think.

Hicke: You were talking--

Forman: We've worked Chardonnay and my theories and developing ideas on how it evolved for me throughout the various places that I've worked.

Different Techniques Required in California Vineyards

Forman: The Cabernet is, of course, very, very important, too. We did make Cabernet and Merlot at Sterling. I tried my best to produce something that was different than what had been produced here. I tried to take what I had learned and observed in Bordeaux and see what it did with the grapes here. I think it was more challenging than the Chardonnay. It's odd that the Chardonnay should have turned out to be immediately recognizable as a Burgundian style and that it was easier.

The Cabernet turned out to be a much bigger challenge. The flavors were more diverse, depending on the vintage. I didn't, let's say, get it quite as quickly with that, or what I tried didn't work as well as I'd wanted it to. I had to continually experiment with those. I'm trying to remember the 1969 wine.

Hicke: Yes, what was wrong with it?

Forman: Well, some of the problems with it--I don't think I really understood thoroughly the maturity level that was necessary. I don't think I really got that for a long time on these red grapes. In Bordeaux, the grapes don't ripen quite as readily as they do in the Napa Valley, and so these grapes are staying on the vine for a long time, and they're being picked in Bordeaux sometimes by need, because of the weather, and sometimes simply because they are mature--with less sugar, but yet the grapes are fully mature, meaning that the tannins have softened, the flavors are fully developed, the anthocyan and pigments are there, and even though the grapes are 22, 21-1/2, 22-1/2 sugar, they are mature.

So I was assuming that perhaps this was enough in California, and picking the grapes with 22-1/2, 23 sugar was really picking green grapes in most circumstances. And so the tannins were hard, and the flavors were somewhat green. It just wasn't that round, supple wine that you were looking for. And so I had to learn this. Gradually, as I went along, I did learn it. I began picking, by 1973 on, much riper grapes.

In some cases it required grapes that were 25, 26 sugar, which was not what I was after with alcohol, and I would add a bit of water to it, which was legal and is still. But I realized finally that California ripened grapes brought sugar on quickly, but it didn't necessarily ripen the fruit. And so I was having to, again, stick my neck out and say, No, I know everybody is traditionally picking Cabernet at 22-1/2, but if we have a healthy vineyard, it needs to be more than that. So I really did try it, and I think some of the wines from 1973 on actually are still very, very viable, and they're delicious.

Hicke: Did you have a vineyard manager?

Forman: No, I did pretty much that myself, guided some of the people. Towards the end there, we did take someone on, but I began guiding the vineyard as well as the winery.

But I'll tell you one of the things I did then that I now have learned much later on in my career that was a mistake: even though I realized the grapes were not mature and required much more sugar and time on the vine to reach maturity, the chemistry still bothered me. I didn't like seeing these high pH's and low acidities. And so I was in the practice of adding a great deal of acid to these wines, both before fermentation and after. The wines were--phew!--they were powerful wines. They had this pretty strong hit of acid, combined with a fairly forceful, full flavor--

granted soft, big tannin, but just the same, they required so much time to finally soften.

I'm now realizing that these acid additions aren't necessary, that the wines really do become balanced with a little less tending to the acidity and that they do age fine and they do hold up and have a stable cycle in their development, so I've backed off a bit from that. I think a lot of California winemakers have. I think we were in the practice, as I was, of worrying too much about the pH.

Hicke: As a result of your classes in enology?

Forman: Oh, yes, it's a result of what you learn in school, that pH is very important to control the microbiology of the wine, the color of the wine, and that it's very risky to have a wine that's somewhat out of balance in pH. But if you look at the Bordeaux wines, they all have relatively high pH's. I don't know why early on I didn't get that. It's something that really kind of bypassed me. I didn't pay enough attention to it. And it took time to learn.

Hicke: You had to wait ten years to see what happened.

Forman: That was it. I think it's amazing how some of the wines at Sterling are still very, very viable and wonderful. I don't think they might be had I not added so much acid, but I think they would have been nicer wines earlier on. So it's just something that you learn over time. You force yourself to change, even though you have this thing in the back of your mind that tells you, "Oh, but be careful; you know the risks that go along with leaving a wine with high pH," but again you say, "But I want the flavor," so you weigh back and forth and try it. If it works, you go with it.

It's kind of this risk winemaking, really. To go out and get these grapes fully mature and leave them in a somewhat natural state is very risky. But it's in the end, if it works, the ultimate flavor, what you're really after. That's what I think premium winemaking is all about. It's knowing how to deal with the risks and guide it along and avoid the risks because you know what's going on with the wine, in order to get the product that's very special in the end. It's easy to do it in a safer manner, but the end result is not a very exciting wine.

Taking Risks, and a Hands-On Management Technique

Hicke: One thing that I wanted to ask you about was taking risks, because you're taking enormous risks.

Forman: Yes, you take a lot of risks. You take a lot of risks leaving these wines with the lees, the Chardonnay. You take a lot of risks keeping them on the vine for a long time. You take a lot of risks in the cellar with wines that are perhaps not exactly at the right acidity level that would guard them against microbiological problems, and so forth. But if you're aware of the danger points and know how to watch for them and prevent them by simple attention, you can get through it.

Hicke: So you just have keep things clean?

Forman: Well, you have to keep things clean, and you have to--you know, it's really one of the reasons I spent so much time myself in the cellar at Sterling. Sterling only had usually three guys helping me. They were high school graduate kids, basically. They had no technical background. There was never an operation in the cellar that I wasn't there doing it myself. It's finally why I decided to leave. I just got tired of making 75,000 cases by myself.

But I would be there. I would do it. I would make sure that all the rackings were done properly. I would make sure that when they topped, they topped properly. I knew the chemical analysis of the wines because I did it all myself. I had no lab assistant. I did everything. And I watched over every single part. I would climb all over the racks and taste the wines. I would be everywhere, at every point, and do all of the jobs right along with the cellar crew. I was part of the cellar crew. I would run the press always by myself. I never let anybody else run it. I did all of the important steps--I was there to do it and finally decided I just couldn't do it anymore, and so I left.

It's still that way [sighs]. Here I am, fifty-four years old, and I'm still running this winery by myself. I have no employees--at this one, none. I'm getting a little tired of it, and I'll be glad when my son comes to join me. But this is the point I'm trying to make: I can, for instance, rack Chardonnay and the last, final racking--because I fined it so carefully--I can do in a manner that will allow me to filter the wine through a .45 micron filter. I do this because, of course, I have no malo fermentation and I have to sterile-filter the wine to assure myself that in the bottle the odd malo bacteria doesn't begin growing.

But if I were to allow just, you know, a normal cellar crew --a Mexican cellar helper or an American, it doesn't make any difference--they wouldn't take the care. They wouldn't know how to run that pump. They wouldn't be as mindful of the last barrel as they are the first barrel. But if I do it myself--because I know if I don't get it right, I'm going to suffer the consequences--I get it done. And so I can take risks where I wouldn't dream of allowing someone else in a winery to take risks because I know what to look for and I'm guiding it.

These are the differences. They add up to this ultimate quality. It's hard to articulate and hard for people to understand. I used to, for instance, sell some of the fruit that I finally bought a vineyard from, Star Vineyards. I'd sell it to Shaw [Charles F. Shaw Vineyard and Winery] and I'd sell it to--I think Ridge [Vineyards] bought some. Who else bought some? I can't remember. A few people bought it.

But particularly at Shaw, where I was consulting, I'd tell them all what to do. Of course, there, because I was a consultant, I wasn't doing it. I'd tell them to do precisely what I do myself here, and when I'd taste the wine, they were two different wines. Unless you do it yourself, it's not going to work. And so I've been very strict in adhering to that principle all my life and career. I think my wines, no matter where I've made them, kind of have my stamp on them.

Again, I don't know how I can articulate what it is I do. I just do it. I do it myself. That's probably the most important point. And there are lots of little details along the way that it probably would never even be able to talk about because I do them so patently that I can't remember that I do them.

Hicke: Do you keep notes?

Forman: Yes, I have a log. They hated me when I left Sterling. I never kept any notes, and so there was nothing to guide anybody after I left about what went on. I kept it mostly in my head. But since I have been here, I keep a log. It's fascinating. I make notes on my impressions of things; obviously, the analysis of things; and all of the important things--the weather, what it was like at the time, what went wrong, what went right, why, what would I do next. I mean, it's a whole thing. Sometimes my mood--it's almost like a diary. I've got two volumes of it, which do give this detail. It would be fun for people to read if they could read it [chuckling].

I think [André] Tchelistcheff did this and had sort of a treatise on how he made wine. I don't know whether it's written

or it's available, but I bet it would be fascinating. But yes, you're right, that does tell you how I think and how I make wine because I do write these things down.

Sterling Wines in the Early Seventies

Forman: So I made some Cabernets that were interesting at Sterling. Oh, I'll never forget: The second year I had one of the biggest disappointments in my career, I think. I had two real serious problems with wines that I produced--two outright, total failures.

One was the 1970 Cabernet. I did allow those grapes to get very ripe. I guess I was catching on quicker than I think I was. And the vintage of 1970 was rare in itself because we had that severe frost, and it knocked the crop down. I think we had twenty-three straight days of frost. You know, there wasn't enough water. There just wasn't enough fuel. There wasn't enough anything to take care totally of all the fruit. So everybody was dealing with a tiny harvest.

It was a very warm year, and we made just very extracted, very delicious, wonderful, wonderful wines--one of the best vintages the Napa Valley had seen in many years. I managed to spoil the whole batch, which was shocking. How it happened: At the time, we were growing, and we had ordered some oak upright tanks, which I was thinking--because of the size that Sterling was going to try to achieve--that we had to put wine right after harvest into oak upright tanks for a period of time, because I didn't think we were going to have space to have all the barrels.

I was going to see what would happen if I aged wine in oak upright tanks for a year and then in barrels for the second year. I've since given up that practice and realized that it's not the way to go. But it was part of my--I didn't want to do it, but I had to compromise in some respect so that I could get everything into the program that they wanted at Sterling.

We ordered these tanks from a company called Marcheve in France. Clever old Marcheve delivered the tanks and installed them just in time for the harvest, so I really didn't have a lot of time to pay attention to the quality of the tanks. For that matter, they looked fine. I soaked them up, rinsed them out, and bang!--put the new harvest into these tanks.

Within a week, the wine starts smelling like smoked bacon. I thought, "My God, what in the world is this?" There were great

concerns. I of course took the wine out of the tanks, but by then the wine had this smoky taste. It was almost a creosote taste. I had Tchelistcheff over, I had some of the professors from the university over, and we looked at the tanks. We finally decided that what had been done was the wood that had been used to make the tanks was not properly air dried. It was green. In the process of firing the tank and bending it, this green wood produced this creosote-like character in the wood. It wasn't recognizable just smelling the tank. It really kind of had a smoky, normal tank smell, but the minute you put wine into it, it extracted it from the depths of the wood where this creosote stuff had been formed. And so the entire batch was ruined, one of the best wines. It would have been very exciting in my career.

It was bad, but it wasn't that bad, so we put it in barrels and we aged it. Today I never would have bottled it, but we were not sophisticated enough, nor was the public sophisticated enough, to know it. So we decided to try it. We bottled it, and, God, every time somebody would taste it, they'd say, "You know, I really like the flavor of this" because the flavors were great. The richness, I mean, the extract. "But what's the smoky character?" I can't imagine how we allowed ourselves to do it. I always knew it, and I would always cringe.

Even today, once or twice a year today, still, somebody says, "You know, I've got a bottle of that 1970 Cabernet. It still has that smoky character." I thought, "Oh, my God, do you have to keep reminding me of that?" It was devastating to me to think what happened. So that was a terrible one.

Hicke: Did you have recourse to the barrel maker?

Forman: Oh, yes. We sued them, and we got a lot of money out of them. We got all new tanks and everything, but still, the wine was--they lived with it financially; I have to live with the fact that the wine is still out there. I just dreaded it.

Hicke: What could have been.

Forman: Yes, what could have been a wonderful vintage. What it did was it made me more alert. You learn by mistakes, and clearly I made a lot of mistakes when I was starting out.

Hicke: What mistake was that?

Forman: Oh, I should have paid more attention to the way the water tasted, but I hadn't enough experience. I just didn't have enough experience to know that those flavors weren't going to be right. I hadn't smelled enough new tanks, you know? Where was I going to

get the experience to do that? I had only been making wine for two or three years. So I was inexperienced, and it was my fault for not probably realizing that it was different and that perhaps I should have somebody else taste it.

But I was under the gun also. The wine was there; we had no place to put it. One of those things you say, "Oh well, I guess it'll be all right," when you shouldn't have. I didn't have the maturity level or the experience to deal with it. Clearly, today I wouldn't do it. But then, there we are. That's how we learn.

And I'll have to say, on Newton's behalf and Stone, the owner and everything--they realized that I had made a big mistake, and they were very decent about it and never once really reprimanded me, never once. They were very good to me, I'll have to say. They really were. I was lucky that way.

So we went on. And then 1971 rolled around, and we had ten days of rain before the Cabernet was harvested, so that was a disaster.

Hicke: The Chardonnay was okay?

Forman: The Chardonnay was fine. The Chardonnay was wonderful wine. But the red was--no, that was '72; '71 they just never got ripe again. I don't know. We had too much crop, and we made this very thin wine that had an aroma of orange peel. I'll never forget it. God, I thought, when am I ever going to make good wine here? I was really starting to wonder.

Sixty-nine was an experimental year; '70, I destroyed with the smoky tank; '71, the grapes never got ripe. Seventy-two, we had ten days of rain. The only wine I made in '72 that was really spectacular--and today it is still a wonderful wine--was what I called Merlot but in fact it was 60 percent Merlot and 40 percent Cabernet--60 percent, and in those days you could call it if it was 51 percent. What it was was pre-rain grapes. It was the Bare Flats Merlot and the Three Palms Cabernet. These were both just wonderful wines, very intensely dark, very concentrated, fully ripe. I put them into all new barrels, and they handled the wood fantastically, and the wine today is miraculous. It's amazing how wonderful it is.

So that was successful, but the rest of the wines were terrible. At least that made me feel good. And then, in 1973, we had a normal year. I'd had plenty of experience to know when to pick and when not to pick, and I decided as well to finally launch into what we would call the Sterling Reserve, and I would pick the best lots from each vintage and make a small quantity of wine

which would go directly into barrels instead of into the uprights first and would be treated precisely as the wine was treated in Bordeaux, which was something I had wanted to do ever since day one. But I really couldn't do it until I felt that the grapes were ripe and until I had had enough experience.

So we created this Sterling Reserve, and it was to be the first year in my career to make wine the way I really wanted to, as it was made in Bordeaux. From that point on, we made Sterling Reserve, and going from there to Newton and from Newton to here, I have made only that style wine--avoided the upright portion, used only new barrels, and used the barrel-racking techniques and the fining in barrels and so forth.

That was really wonderful. And thankfully, the vintage turned out to be beautiful. The '74 rolled around, and it was even better. The '74 Reserve today is still one of the classic '74 wines. It's wonderful wine. And we really went along, and life was getting better.

Hicke: What about the Sterling regular, other than the Reserve?

Forman: Even the regular is nice, yes. They're both nice. But the Reserves are very special. The Reserves were the wines that were the pick of the litter, so to speak, and went directly in the barrel. So I stuck my neck out and made the blend early on, which was also very untypical of California. I still do it. It's pretty much what would happen in Bordeaux. So the Reserve wines were wines that aged as the final blend and were very much hand-done wines--usually bottled unfiltered. I still bottle wine sometimes filtered, sometimes not, but I pay attention to the microbiology and let that be the determining factor of bottling, rather than the clarity.

I've managed to master fining to a point where the wine is always clear--and that's a subject that I'd love to talk about later, about clarity of wines and filtration. I have a real opinion on that at this date.

Hicke: Do you have anything to do with determining the price niche or the marketing?

Forman: Newton did that. This will be fun for people to hear. I remember when we came out in--oh, I guess it was--when was it? Between '69 and '72. I remember having a very important discussion with Newton and Stone. My opinion finally was asked, and I remember being astounded at what they wanted to do and was not for it but ultimately gave in to it, and that was how we were to price the Merlot.

They said they wanted to charge five dollars a bottle for it. I [chuckling] said, "You can't charge five dollars a bottle for it. Nobody will buy it. That's way too expensive." [laughing] Isn't that classic? I said, "Beaulieu Private Reserve is four-fifty a bottle. How in the world do you think you're going to charge five dollars a bottle and have people swallow that one?" Isn't that amusing?

Hicke: That is. How things have changed!

Forman: Now if you don't charge seventy-five dollars a bottle, you haven't arrived to the party yet. It is a very amazing thing to look at and realize that this was twenty-five years ago, and we were looking at five dollars as being a high price to charge. God, what has happened!

Hicke: Did it sell?

Forman: It sold. Everybody loved it. Merlot was popular. It really charged right along.

[tape interruption]

Forman: We were discussing the wines at Sterling and the Cabernets and how they evolved and how I finally managed to get, by 1973, both ripe grapes and a system and finally a wine that I was really happy with because I was doing it the way I had originally observed in Bordeaux and I wanted so much to do myself.

Hicke: Can you tell--I guess you must be able to--what it's going to taste like in fifteen years?

Forman: Well, you can get some idea. I don't know if I was able to then. I think I can now. I don't know. I'm able to--as any experienced winemaker is--I'm able to look at brand-new wines, wines that have just finished malo, perhaps, and look through all of the fresh fermentation, yeasty, odd aromas and see what's behind it, look at the texture, the structure, and the flavors and the aromas and see what might go together and determine what the final product will be like.

Hicke: You have to be able to do that in order to blend it, right?

Forman: Yes, you do. You definitely do.

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Forman: So Sterling was really becoming very exciting for me. I was getting confidence in myself by the time the '73 vintage was

completed. I saw then that I could deal with the volume, that I could produce unique wines. I was beginning to understand the vineyards, I was understanding the maturity level that was necessary, Sterling was becoming recognized as a new producer of quality wine, so I was having fun. We were planting new vineyards. I was getting more involved in viticulture.

Hicke: Deciding what to plant and where?

Forman: Well, I made those decisions along with the owners. We talked about it. We knew what we wanted to produce. I think we made some mistakes in the early days, planting so much Chardonnay up there, but it still made a very unique wine. It was sought after and it had its own style, so it wasn't perhaps as bad a mistake as you'd otherwise think.

Plant and Equipment

Hicke: We never really talked about the building, designing the winery.

Forman: Yes, designing the winery was a lot of fun. It was really fortunate that we were able to start the winery on nothing more than an open pad and a tilt-up building at the bottom of what was going to be the secondary winery, the final winery. I could test this equipment that I had. It was never going to be in its permanent location, so I could change it, I knew, if it was wrong.

Actually, we bought a used press. I can't imagine why we kept it for as long as we did. We bought the old Wilma-style bladder press. I think we bought it from Robert Mondavi. Yes, exactly. It was the press that I had used at Robert Mondavi. They were upgrading. They bought a Bücher, which I wish we had had the good sense to buy, and we bought Robert Mondavi's old press.

And we bought a brand-new Healdsburg Machine [Co.] crusher and a Healdsburg piston pump for the crushing equipment. And then we bought Müller and Valley Foundry fermenting tanks--of course, with all the temperature-control jackets and so forth, which were relatively new in those days but available, at least.

Hicke: You made all these decisions?

Forman: Yes, I had to go around, find these companies, and decide on where to put the valves and what type of valves to have and what kind of pumps to get and so forth. So we bought pretty much what was

available in those days. It was rather standard equipment: piston pumps, centrifugal pumps, and the bladder press, the Healdsburg Machine crusher--which was a good crusher; it's a very good crusher. There are better crushers now available, of course, but in those days it was a very decent crusher--very, very well built, very easy to clean, relatively gentle on the fruit.

So we designed this plant with tanks ranging from 10,000-gallon capacity down to 3,000-gallon capacity, with stainless steel wine lines and must lines going to all the tanks. It was quite fun installing all of this and seeing how it worked. We operated it for--let's see, '69, '70 and '71, and in '71 we began building and designing the winery that's now at the top of the hill. The old pad then became, after the new winery was done, a warehouse.

To build the new winery, obviously, we wanted to put a great deal of thought into it--more, certainly, than we had on this pad to get started at the bottom. Again, I did a lot of research, traveled to Europe, looked at more detail with the equipment that was available, talked with people around here about what they liked and what they didn't like.

Dick Graff at that point had started working with Newton on his barrel project. He and I would do the research for it and gather barrels and so forth in Europe to sell in California. Dick and I would spend sessions together, laying out a winery on this unusual, sloping hill that we thought would be functional from the point of view of making wine. We worked on the interior design.

A fellow named Martin Waterfield, the comptroller for Sterling International Paper, Newton's company, was a very clever sort of amateur architect, I guess you could say. He put a facade around the interior working design that Dick and I had worked on. So we came up with this sort of segmented winery that stepped down the hill, where we had at one level the fermentation and crushing. We put the crusher in a pit so that we didn't have to elevate the grapes coming up out of the receiver hopper, which I thought was an important thing and something that I had observed in Bordeaux and thought that that would be important, so that was unique.

And we went from there into levels that dropped slowly down the hill. We had barrel rooms. I had observed in some of the--I'm trying to think where I saw this. I knew we had to stack barrels. I hated the thought of having to do it, but I knew we had to conserve space and stack barrels. But I didn't want to stack barrels on top of each other. I guess I did a lot of research on material handling companies. They had available at the time what we call a cantilevered rack. I was the first,

certainly, to bring those into the Valley and thought that this had to be a much better way to store barrels than to stack them one barrel on top of the other.

I wanted to be able to get to the barrels, I wanted to be able to roll the barrels upside down and wash them, I wanted to be able to get into each barrel and inspect it. And so I was determined to find a system of stocking barrels without actually putting them on top of each other. These cantilevered racks really worked. They were both more attractive to look at and very, very functional.

Hicke: Can you describe them?

Forman: It was an upright beam with arms going off in opposite directions. On these arms, rails were attached. These beams were built of such a strength that they were able to actually extend out and hold the weight of a line of barrels on top of them. They were really just an upright post holding a series of rails.

Hicke: Over the lower line?

Forman: Yes, and we had them five high. So the barrels were in fact stacked five high, but no barrel was ever touching another barrel. They were stacked on these double-sided, cantilevered racks. They were really wonderful.

Hicke: Where did you get them?

Forman: I can't remember who supplied them, but there was a metal fabricating company who put them together for us. They were used in other industries to stack pallets on. I think, actually, I saw them at the McGraw-Hill Paper Company. I remember going there and looking at forklifts and noticing these racks and saying, "You know, these racks might be useful for barrels." And sure enough, they did work. I think other people began using them. That was a nice touch.

So Dick and I laid it all out and figured that it would work. We hired Keith and Associates--they were structural engineers--to draw and design the building. I guess one of his original buildings on wineries was Chappellet [Winery], so he had had some experience putting wineries together. We all worked together and came up with what today is Sterling Vineyards and hasn't really changed, really, since then.

It worked. It worked very well. It worked to the point where I only required three cellar workers and myself to finally, when I was there, produce up to 75,000 cases in the winery. It

worked really well. We crushed everything and operated the winery and bottled the wine, did all of the necessary functions with relative ease. I think it was laid out very, very nicely. Dick and I were quite proud of ourselves, in the end, for having put a winery together that was so simple to run.

Hicke: And efficient.

Forman: It was efficient. It was really efficient.

Hicke: I think you said it was Martin--

Forman: Martin Waterfield?

Hicke: Yes, who designed the cable car.

Forman: Yes, he knew that we had to be involved in tours. He was an astute observer of the Valley and the way it was changing. He realized that it was going to be very tourist-oriented. Newton, actually, in his economy sort of sense of how the wine business should be run, said, "I think if we do this right, we can sell all of the wine out of the winery." And so they decided--wrongly, but they decided to gear the winery up so purposely around tourism that if it was, they thought, properly done, the wine need not be marketed in any other area. Well, of course, that proved to be dead wrong.

But at least they got the function of the winery to the level where it really was an exciting place to visit. Martin conceived of this self-guided tour because he thought that the tours that currently were available in the winery were boring and people didn't want to be herded around. So he said, "I think we can design this whole thing with catwalks and gantries and a fun ride up to the place, where people will treat this as a destination point and really have fun, and also be educated."

He was absolutely right. People loved it. I think today, still, it's probably one of the most fun places to visit. So he got that right. We did a lot of right things there and in the end made some pretty exciting wines, towards the latter part of when I was still working there. I'm sure they still are. I think the wines are different today, but I think they're very good wines. They don't look like the wines I made. I know that. But, then, why should they?

Hicke: Well, you didn't leave any notes.

Winemaking at Sterling Mid- to Late Seventies

Forman: No, I didn't. That really irritated them. God, I'll never forget. A guy named Theo [pronounced TAY-oh] Rosenbrand was chosen to take my place, along with Sergio Traverso, so they hired two winemakers to take my place--why, I'm not sure--but they did. They were just infuriated to think that I left absolutely no notes. Theo thought it was absolutely ridiculous--Theo, of course, was the chief cellar master under Tchelistcheff at Beaulieu, so he had been responsible for really doing all the mechanical things necessary to make all the Beaulieu wines. So he came with a lot of training. He thought that the way I had made wine at Sterling was total nonsense. He couldn't understand the barrel-to-barrel techniques, and he couldn't understand fermenting Chardonnay in barrels--all of the things I did, he said didn't work.

I remember he made the first wines there, and they were almost total flops compared to what had been made there. I thought that was very amusing. And they ultimately did--because I left a guy in the cellar named Bill Dyer, who became, actually, the chief winemaker there some years later. But he brought them back to making wines the way he and I had made wines. I think they found that it worked a little better with their fruit and with the way the winery was laid out.

Hicke: He was there, watching you?

Forman: He was. I trained him. I had a most unfortunate circumstance, oh, about three years before I left. I had a cellar crew who--well, I don't know. Maybe because I spoiled them. Who knows what the reason was? Maybe because they were not old enough to really understand what they had. But they became disgruntled with the pay scale and the benefits and one thing and other, and they just got more and more difficult to work with. I suddenly realized that they weren't doing what I really wanted them to do. Or, if they were doing it, they were doing it begrudgingly.

And so I said, "You know, guys,"--I didn't even check with Newton or Stone about doing this, but I took it upon myself, which was probably a little lofty, thinking back at it, but at any rate, I said, "Guys, I don't think this job is really a happy one for you anymore, and I'm suggesting that I think you better leave." So I fired the entire cellar crew [laughing], and I was left with absolutely no one. Newton and Stone were aghast to think that I did it.

Today, of course, we would have had the labor boards on our heels in no time. But I think, really, thinking back on it, it was probably the right thing to do as far as what evolved from it. This fellow, Bill Dyer, came strictly sort of off the street, realizing that I needed some help. He had the desire to make wine. He'd fiddled around at working in the cellar at a winery in Soquel, down in the Santa Cruz area. But he was really just a philosophy major from University of California at Santa Cruz, I guess. A really very likeable guy and a guy who was very sharp and very eager to learn and very enjoyable to work with--a step above the fellows that I had been working with, only because he was more educated.

And so he jumped in with me, and we quickly found some more cellar crew, one of whom was Dennis Johns, who of course has gone to work at St. Clement [Vineyards] and made wonderful wines there. And a couple of other guys. We kept at it, doing what I had done in the past. Bill was a very quick learner, so that when I left by 1978, Bill had fully taken charge and knew what was going on. While they hired Theo and Sergio to run the place, they were short-lived there, and finally they sent Bill to school part-time at Davis and had Bill stay, and Bill was the chief winemaker for Sterling for a long time, up until about a year ago, when they fired him--for what reason, I'll never know. I think it was a big mistake. But it was, as I told him, probably the biggest relief of his life. He has since agreed with me [chuckling].

Hicke: What's he doing now?

Forman: He's consulting. His wife, Dawnine Sample, is chief winemaker at Domaine Chandon.

Hicke: I was wondering if that was the same Dyer.

Forman: It is, it is. Bill is a terrific guy. Bill has a very good head on his shoulders and a very good knowledge of how to make wine. I think they were crazy to do what they did, but that's a corporation for you.

Decision to Join Newton

Forman: So that was Sterling. By 1978, I had kind of run my stay there. I had been there for ten years. I got interested in producing wine on a smaller level. Newton had come back, having left two years previously, when they sold the winery to Coca-Cola and said, "Ric, would you like to do a winery together? A small winery."

You design it. Let's go back to what you really want to do, make the classic wines that you want to make. We'll go out, we'll find some land, we'll design the winery you want the way you want to design it, and we'll be partners in this operation, not employer-employee."

I thought, "My God, this is wonderful." My wife at the time didn't think it was so wonderful because she had trouble with Newton's somewhat controlling attitude towards me. I was pretty much mesmerized by him and would kind of follow him and do anything that he wanted to do. That was a serious problem for me and my family, but I--rightly or wrongly--went ahead and did it anyway, and joined Newton.

Hicke: Before we get to that, were there any major changes when Coca-Cola bought the winery?

Forman: No, not really. Coca-Cola went right along with whatever I wanted to do. I had complete control there. See, Stone stayed on with Coca-Cola. So I still had part of the old feel there. He became the president. I reported to him, and it was no different, really, than reporting to him and Newton. So no, the Coca-Cola crowd didn't bother me at all. They had plenty of money, they would spend money, they would do what we needed to do, they bought a nice new press, which I loved. Finally, I didn't have to stand on that awful old press that I'd had for so many years. So no, they were a good thing for me.

Hicke: What did Newton do? You said he left at that point.

Forman: He left. Newton is a very proud man. The minute he left, he really didn't think highly of Sterling anymore. He kind of looked a bit askance at Coca-Cola, I think--the whole concept of it all. I think he was proud to have owned Sterling, but having backed out of it, I think he was left a bit empty-hearted when he realized that he had put all this effort and really wanted it to work and then, because it was not making financial sense at the time, had to bail out of it. I think he was saddened by it, but he didn't want to admit it, that he really did want to be in the wine business.

He and I still had a good relationship together, and so he thought, "Well, let's do it. Maybe Ric is ready to leave, too." And so he pretty much enticed me to leave. I would have stayed at Sterling, but he enticed me to leave because it sounded like a better deal.

Hicke: What year was this?

Forman: This was 1978. I finished the harvest of '78 at Sterling, and in November gave notice and left. They were not very happy with it all, but they were very understanding, and what can you do when somebody feels like they need to go on? It's probably pretty amazing that right out of school I stayed at a place for ten years and did get it established and well on its way, so I didn't really feel like I left them in the lurch. I had a fully trained cellar crew that knew what was going on. I helped them pick the winemakers that were to carry on the operation. I didn't leave them a lot of notes, but I was there to talk to them. They managed just fine without me.

So I went on to join Newton and was very excited about it. Unfortunately, my wife was not, and that caused a lot of trouble. But I was excited about the project and put a massive amount of energy into developing Newton Vineyard.

IV NEWTON VINEYARD, 1978-1982

[Interview 3: March 3, 1999] ##

Vineyard Property

Hicke: We just had gotten up to the beginning of Newton Vineyard. I know you had also been buying property here, but maybe it would be easier to come back to that when we talk about your own business.

Forman: Let's start with Newton. I was at Sterling for two years without Newton. Newton sold to Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola remained. Newton suggested that I probably stay there as he left; it would help him, he said. I was wanting to make life easier for him because I still had allegiances to Newton, not to Coca-Cola.

Hicke: Why would it have made it easier for him?

Forman: He didn't want to leave them in the lurch without somebody to run the property. They knew I was capable of running it, obviously, since I helped build it and ran it practically by myself. He said, "Stay. They want that. I'll talk to you about possibilities later," and so I agreed to stay.

About a year into my first year with Coca-Cola, Newton suggested that perhaps it would be fun to join as partners; why don't I start looking for property? I did. I looked at a number of pieces of property and ultimately found 750 acres of property above Madrona Avenue in St. Helena. It was a hilly property owned by the Meyer family.

Hicke: Was it planted?

Forman: It had no grapes on it, although--it was very funny--the realtor that showed me the property said, "Look, I don't know whether you're after grapes or not, but this property certainly has no possibilities for grapes." I said, "Show it to me anyway." I said, "I don't quite follow. Do you see over there in the brush?"

What do you think those are?" He said, "Oh, those are grape stakes." I said, "Sure they are. There were grape stakes probably during Prohibition, but the whole place has been taken over by forest," which is typical of many hillside locations. I said, "I know it doesn't look like it's easily plantable, but I see lots of potential here."

Hicke: Is it on this side? [pointing to map]

Forman: Yes, it's looking directly over--it's all the hillside land up there. So I said, "I think it *does* have potential," and told Newton so, and of course we looked at it together and thought a great deal about it. He ultimately made a bid and bought it.

Hicke: May I ask how much he paid for it?

Forman: I don't think he paid a lot. I think he paid about \$750,000, and it was 750 acres, about a thousand dollars an acre, which is unheard of, of course, today. Not very much was usable for vineyard, of course. We managed to get--oh, I must have planted fifty acres of it. I think he has planted an additional twenty. So it's not a high percentage of plantable land, but just the same, it was a very good deal. It had two homes on it.

So there we were in 1978, in the spring. He bought the property, and asked, of course, formally at that point if I would join him as a partner. I was thrilled with the idea. My wife was not thrilled with the idea. I probably should have listened to her. In retrospect, that was a plea on her part that I didn't pay close enough attention to, and I realize it now and didn't then. I was so enthusiastic about the possibilities of really being an owner in a winery and launching off into a project which would challenge me and which would be of a scale that I could control. The whole scope of the thing was utterly about as exciting as it could be for me.

And at that point I was still getting along personally, myself, with Newton. My wife, as I said, feared him. I didn't fear him. I found him exciting. He stimulated me and created the enthusiasm, and he was very instrumental in making me think and making me stretch, and so I wanted to do it.

And so I said yes. I gave notice to the people at Sterling, one of whom happened to have been his former partner in Sterling International. He remained at Sterling after Newton left as well.

Hicke: Michael Stone?

Forman: Michael Stone--and became the president. He soon left as well and went into the Department of the Army, serving under [President Ronald] Reagan as the Undersecretary of the Army.

They were not terribly pleased that I was leaving, but I think understanding. Being a large corporation, Coca-Cola, they had seen people come and go, and they realized that I had been there for ten years and that obviously it was what I wanted to do, and that's what I had to do. So they said, "Go, and have our best wishes," which I thought was decent.

I jumped right in with Newton directly after the harvest of 1978 at Sterling. So I completed the harvest at Sterling, and on November 1st left, so the wines were just pressed and just into cooperage. I left them in the hands of Bill Dyer, whom I had trained over the last three years and had complete confidence in. And I helped them find replacement winemakers, as I mentioned earlier in the interview here, that I felt could help--one being Theo Rosenbrand, Tchelistcheff's key cellar worker at Beaulieu. And the other, Sergio Traverso, was someone I had known for quite a few years and who at that point, I think, was working at Concannon [Winery].

So here we are, starting the winter off in November of 1978. having to figure out what to do with this basically 750 acres of raw land.

Hicke: It was hillside.

Forman: Very hillside. There wasn't a flat piece on it. I don't think we got one flat piece of vineyard on it. Everything was terraced or in one angle or another, running up a slope or down a slope.

Planting the Grapes

Hicke: What was the soil like?

Forman: The soil was varied. Some of the soils had a lot of clay. There were other faces that had red decomposed shale. There were sandstone soils. We had many exposures, we had many elevations. We basically had to take the hill and look at it as little, faceted pieces of land that we could get. It was a massive challenge for me. I had run vineyards at Sterling, but not as seriously as I had to take this one on. I had used my technical background from school to kind of interject ideas on what I thought of crop level and pruning styles, but I had never really

gotten involved seriously in a planting project, nor in choosing varieties, clones--well, we didn't do too much clonal selection in those days--but rootstocks.

And the fact of the matter is there weren't very many rootstock selections, either, because we only used one, obviously, which is why the Valley is falling apart. AXR was the rootstock of choice and availability at the time.

Hicke: So you planted everything on it?

Forman: Unfortunately. It has all been replanted at this point. I really had a big challenge on my hands. I had to first go out and find somebody whom I felt confident in who could put a team together. I had met a guy named Lupe Maldonado, a dear friend still today, who had been at Sterling, and I had kind of watched at Sterling and realized that he had more intelligence than the average Mexican vineyard worker. Spoke fluent English, which was helpful. He just had a nice personality, and I liked him. So I asked him if he would be interested in joining us. He was.

So he and I put a team of employees together and jumped right into looking at what was plantable and what wasn't. We found a fellow who had worked with Sterling, clearing land on the Diamond Mountain property, who was willing to come and start clearing for us. In those days, there were no permits required. We just charged ahead. And so we took all slopes that we figured were farmable and where we could contain erosion and could farm in a relatively safe and rational manner.

Knowing that there wasn't any flat, we had to look at all hillsides. We didn't try to take things that were too severe right in the beginning, just the more gentle slopes, and started clearing. The winter was mild that year, and we cleared almost all winter long and were ready to plant quite a bit of it in the spring.

We developed the lake that was already on the property--put a bigger spillway in it, got more water into it, and put this elaborate system of irrigation--I'll never forget. I thought I was really more of a plumber than anything that year. I had to put in miles and miles of irrigation system and had to overcome huge pressure differences going from the lake all the way up to the top of the mountain. We were dealing with pressures of four and five hundred pounds per square inch, which is enormous on big pipelines. So we had pipes breaking all the time.

I had to figure out how to put ditches through the mountains and how to put thrust blocks in--things I never had to deal with

before--and how to put irrigation systems in, and valves. On top of it all, how to lay out these properties. I was trained by a guy to work with a transit and to work with eye levels and to lay out terraces--none of which I had ever done before. But Lupe and I kind of were taught and taught ourselves and somehow laid out all of these terraces.

I hired another friend, whom I had met at Sterling, who was still a very close friend and who does all of my soil contracting work, Gene Boiadjieff [pronounced BOYD-jeff], B-o-i-a-d-j-i-e-f-f. He's a terrific guy. Very, very bright and capable man with heavy equipment. And so he came in and did all the terracing. We put in drainage, and we put in the irrigation, we put in the stakes, we put in the trellis system, and phenomenally were ready to go and planted a great deal during the summer of '79.

Hicke: Okay, I have to ask you a little bit more. How did you decide whether to do the terracing up and down or around? And I want to know what kind of grapes you planted.

Forman: Okay. We had done quite a project just before I left at Sterling, at Diamond Mountain. A guy named Chuck Saunders helped lay the property out for Bill [William] Hill, who had started the project and then we ended up finishing it once we bought it from Bill Hill. So I contacted Chuck Saunders--who was quite a character, I must say--and he came over. He and I basically did most of the layout together until I figured I had caught onto the technique, and then Lupe and I finished.

We just took a hill and in those days pretty much went with the contour. We'd use a hand level or a transit and follow the contour around and put marking stakes every twenty-five or fifty or a hundred feet, wherever the visual ability allowed. These allowed, then, the tracker to come in and cut terraces to our marks.

Hicke: The terraces were how wide?

Forman: Oh, generally the terrace ended up being about eight feet wide but, of course, depending on the slope, the distance between terraces could be anywhere from nine feet to fifteen feet. The steeper the slope, the more distant the terraces would be because you had to take a cut and form a toe.

Hicke: Would that plant one row of vines?

Forman: That would only plant one row of vines. It's very wasteful of land, really, I've since learned, and I almost never cut terraces now. We go straight up and down the mountain. At the same time,

I came and did my property here, because I had purchased this piece. I put terraces on this piece. Well, I have since replanted this piece, and I wiped all the terraces out, and I go straight up and down the hill, as they would in France. You actually end up having less erosion by going straight up and down the hill. You move and disturb much less soil, and you get far greater density and more use out of the land. I didn't know that in those days, and so we cut all these terraces, and there they are. They still remain.

Varieties--we knew we wanted to do Cabernet and Chardonnay--Cabernet meaning we wanted Cabernet, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, which I had at that point determined were all very valuable as blending grapes in and amongst themselves.

Hicke: Did you keep them separate in the plantings?

Forman: Oh, yes. We planted separate slopes, slopes that had the most extreme exposure and austere soil to Cabernet; the more clay-like soils, we planted Chardonnay on. One particular soil that was very rocky, I felt the Franc would do well on. We switched it around here and there. Of course, most of the production, most of the planting was Cabernet, because we wanted the Cabernet to dominate.

We planted no Chardonnay on the property. However, we did decide that we wanted some Sauvignon Blanc and planted a fairly good hillside with Sauvignon Blanc. In retrospect, I think it would have been much better to plant Cabernet there. I think at this point, since they replanted, they did put Cabernet there.

Hicke: Why?

Forman: It made interesting wine. Well, it was red soil, fabulous exposure, and would have produced very high-quality red grapes, I think.

Hicke: Which would have been a better use of the property?

Forman: Much better use, but Newton wanted Sauvignon Blanc, and I was fascinated with Sauvignon Blanc. We had no idea at that time where to get quality Sauvignon Blanc, so we decided to plant our own. Considering what you can get for a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, it was a bum choice financially. I'm sure it has been changed at this point. Interesting working with the grapes, but--

Hicke: Is that because you wanted the Bordeaux varieties?

Forman: Yes, we wanted a Bordeaux theme, but we also realized that we should think Chardonnay. We bought the Chardonnay from a vineyard at that time that was called the Adamson Vineyard. It was down in Rutherford. I since have purchased that vineyard, and I own it now, along with Reg Oliver. We're general partners in the vineyard we now call Rutherford Star.

I produced at Newton the first harvest for that vineyard in 1980, and it was spectacular wine, and it's still very good wine; it hasn't gone over the hill yet. Eighty-one and '82 were all--some of the best Chardonnay I ever made. They were really very good wines. Extremely rich, extremely long lived, and very concentrated--that wonderful French Meursault sort of crème brûlée character.

I determined that I liked that vineyard very much, which, after having left Newton, was very excited to be able to buy, along with Reg Oliver, who is by far the largest owner of the vineyard; he owns the highest percentage of it. But it has been a great vineyard to work with. It has been the vineyard that I've made almost all--and certainly now, all of the Chardonnay for Forman Vineyards from.

Hicke: Let's go back to '78 and '79.

Forman: It was quite amazing that I left Sterling in '78, joined Newton in November of '78, cleared and planted in the spring of '79 the vineyard, as well as designing, building, and completing the winery for the harvest of '79. I don't know how we ever did it. I have no idea how we did it.

This is what happened and what I'm sure my wife realized was going to happen: Newton totally mesmerized me as to grabbing hold of this project, making it happen, and making it happen today, rather than tomorrow. And so I worked nonstop to the point of, of course, forgetting that I had another life; i.e., my family. So that began to fall apart, which was unfortunate. I did succeed in finishing the winery.

Building and Equipment

Hicke: Let me ask you about building the winery.

Forman: The winery was an immense task. We determined that we wanted underground cellars. They've since dug tunnels, as have I on my property, but we didn't know that the technology really existed

then. I insisted that I wanted an underground cellar, as did Newton, so that we could have better control of humidity and more natural control of temperature.

We had a semi-hillside location that we chose to build on. We found an excavation company that came in and carved, literally, a notch into the hill. We put the cellar in the notch, and then we put a very strong roof on the cellar, and we buried it with about six feet of soil. It did manage to keep the cellar fairly cool. We ran into a severe humidity problem, however, that I had never experienced before and ran into a lot of trouble with in the 1980 harvest. I'll explain that in a minute.

But the cellar was unique. It had compartments that we could keep at different temperature levels during harvest, which I did have air conditioning for because I realized that if I was going to ferment, I had to keep the cellar very cool, so we had compartments for temperature control and a very simple, straightforward layout for a winery that was designed to produce, we thought, no more than about 8,000 cases.

We had a very neatly designed, octagon-shaped crushing pad directly above the cellar, with around the perimeter of the octagon, all the fermenters. We bought some really neat--at that time, we thought--crushing equipment. The Demoisi crusher had just come out. This was the latest technology. Came from the experiment station in Beaune [France], for crushers. It was indeed a very good crusher and remains to be so today, one of the two best crushers.

We bought a membrane press, which was just being offered on the market as the latest technology in pressing, which it indeed was as well and still remains to be. So we had great equipment--nice, small fermenters; good crushing equipment. I designed self-tilting gondolas which we would haul through the field, and we could harvest one-ton batches, which was very convenient, I thought, for quality. We got to the crusher in a matter of minutes from picking.

So everything was done on a smaller scale than at Sterling and more in keeping with the tradition that I experienced in Europe and tried to experience at Sterling, and now felt fully capable of having a complete handle on.

Hicke: You mentioned that you took new role in viticulture. Is this what you're talking about: the complete designing of the vineyard and all that?

Forman: Yes. I'd never been used to the fact of having to design irrigation systems and actually install them myself, to the level of involvement in planting and to the level of involvement in layout. I was really for the first year a viticulturist, in every sense of the manner--from actually doing the physical work to doing the layout to ordering all of the supplies. I learned a lot by doing it. I learned how to be a good viticulturist. Even though I had the technical background from school, I had none of the practical background, but I learned in a big hurry.

Lupe was very helpful to me. He came with a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge. The two of us, I think, did a fine job. I would have done it differently today than then, but we always continue to learn if our eyes are open. Things change. Ideas change. Today we would plant the vineyard closer. We'd use European clones. Obviously, the rootstocks have changed dramatically. The trellis systems are no longer T trellises; we use vertical trellis systems. We no longer terrace grapes; we go straight up and down the hills. The irrigation systems are somewhat different, although we're still using the drip irrigation. Fertilizer injectors are now available. I mean, it's almost like night and day today, compared to then.

But since I've continued to plant vineyards and actually joined David Abreu in his original days, with his vineyard management company, and helped him along through our visits to Europe, we have both evolved together, and our viticulture is leaps and bounds ahead of what it was in 1978.

Cooperage: The Forman Barrel

Hicke: What about cooperage?

Forman: Cooperage--I really have stuck with the same coopers from day one at Sterling through my current practices at Forman Vineyard. We liked Nadalier then and introduced Nadalier into California, and I'm still using a high percentage of Nadalier barrels for the red wine. Always chateau barrels, what we call Chateau Barrique. It was actually a barrel that I invented. I liked the thin-staved Bordeaux chateau barrel, because I felt that the flavor was different than the export barrel they were selling when we originally introduced them into California.

I realized that the smoky, harsh taste of the transport barrel that they wanted to introduce into California was too strong, and I wanted to try some of the chateau barrels. Did try

them, found that the taste in the chateau barrels was much more similar to what I noticed the wines of Bordeaux in Bordeaux tasted like, realized that the thin staves had a lot to do with it. They were less difficult to bend, took much less fire, and acquired a far different flavor because of the firing technique.

So I ordered these barrels. And for some time, the barrels, of course, came in the traditional manner, with the chestnut hoop on them, and they looked very fine when you had a non-humid cellar. But in the humid cellar, these chestnut hoops fell apart within months. So I said to Jean-Jacques, "How about giving me the same barrel, but instead of the chestnut hoops put a wide hoop on the ends." He said, "Great, I guess we'll call it the Forman Barrel, so when you order we'll know what they are."

And so they did, for about three years, and then other people started seeing these barrels and wanting them. They actually started selling a large percentage of these barrels to the point where now, I think, almost all of the barrels are being purchased chateau-type, rather than transport-type. Of course, they had to change them from Forman to something else, so they're now calling them Chateau Barrique.

Hicke: And you didn't get a patent!

Forman: No. They're even starting to use them in Bordeaux now. A small point, but I did start something.

Hicke: Fabulous! Do the thinner staves allow more air through?

Forman: Perhaps there's a bit more. That could be part of the factor as well. But there's a dramatically different flavor. So that was the Bordeaux barrel.

I've used other people's barrels. I've used Demptos, I've used Sorie, I've used Sylvan, and I'm using a mixture of other barrels that I find with subtly unique characteristics, and very nice as a blending component with, always, Nadalier. I always use some Nadalier.

But on the Chardonnay side, I prefer the thicker-staved, Burgundian barrel, and I've found through experimenting with many different coopers that I go back always to François Frere as being the flavor that I like best and that matches my style of Chardonnay best. These have a totally different flavor than the Bordeaux barrel. They're very thick-staved. They have a smokier, more cinnamon-like character, much more aggressive character, I would say. But it somehow brings out that toasty, crème brûlée character from the fully ripe Chardonnay that I like.

Hicke: What about the reds?

Forman: The reds, always in Bordeaux, the Bordeaux thin-staved barrel. That also seems to be more appropriate. It has a more violet-like character, a more vanilla-like character, and that seems to blend better with the red wines, Cabernet, than that cinnamon sort of smell that the Burgundy barrels have.

Hicke: I'm going to turn this over.

Winemaking Techniques

Hicke: In your winemaking, were you doing anything different from what you had done at Sterling?

Forman: I started doing things a little differently. The Chardonnay was handled pretty much the same, except for the fact that we were picking in smaller batches, we were using the Demoisi crusher, and in fact, yes, I would say there was one dramatic difference. The Demoisi crusher had the ability to take the de-stemming device out, and so I was crushing whole clusters, just crushing the whole clusters without de-stemming them, so we were crushing with whole clusters. This gave us a clearer juice, added a bit of tannin material from the stems, and I think did add a different quality aspect to the juice and wine than I was getting at Sterling.

The barrels were the same. I would say that the other unique aspect of handling the Chardonnay at Newton versus Sterling was that I would leave the wines in barrels with lees for a much longer period of time. At Sterling I was in the habit of taking the wine off the lees within a month after fermentation. At Newton I experimented with leaving the wine on the lees. Dick Graff and I were experimenting with it at the same time, and I think we were certainly some of the first to try this.

Found that it added a very nice character to the wine. It lengthened the flavor of the wine and added that toasty Chardonnay flavor that we were all looking for, that sort of richness that they were getting out of Burgundy that we never seemed to be able to get and that this was helping us with. So I would leave the wine with the lees for up to six months before we'd rack it. So the combination of stems versus no stems at Sterling, and leaving on the lees for six to six-plus months was, I think, quite a deviation.

Hicke: When you say it lengthened the flavor, does that mean it lasts longer on the palate?

Forman: It's both an actual flavor, and it's the texture that it gives. I think it gives richer texture to the wine, and it gives that toasty sort of autolysis character that you get from champagne. Champagne, after all, is sitting with the lees in the bottle, in bottle-fermented champagne, for as much as five years. We get that really toasty, autolyzed yeast character which is, again, a flavor as well as a richness.

The same thing is happening to Chardonnay, sitting with the lees in the barrel. It did prove to make the wine far more sophisticated. It's obviously being used extensively today with anybody who's serious about making Chardonnay. But it was considered fairly unique and a bit out there in those days. It was considered to be risky. Actually, it was barely even considered! People didn't even know about it. We experimented with it. Other people heard about it and were interested in it at the same time, and, just as barrel fermentation caught on, so did the sur lees technique catch on.

Other practices that I experimented with were adding no sulfur dioxide [SO₂] to the juice before fermentation, something I didn't do at Sterling but I did at Newton. The juice would oxidize severely in the press, but this oxidized, polyphenolic material would settle out during the settling process, and after fermentation, the wine would become clear, and I think more clear than had we added SO₂, which we've discovered is to be expected. And I think it would be less prone to oxidation after fermentation, and it seemed to have less bitter characteristics than wines fermented with sulfur dioxide.

The risk was that malo would start. I never would--at Sterling, Newton, or Forman or anybody that I would ever consult for--encourage malolactic in white wine. The sulfur would have to be added directly after fermentation. But I did like the result of it. I'm trying to think why I steered away from it, because I have steered away from it. In fact, this last harvest I was going to experiment again with it and, in the fury of the harvest, never did. I had other things I was working on.

Hicke: Are you talking about malolactic?

Forman: No, I'm talking about the addition of sulfur with white juice. I think I was worried basically about the lactobacillus infection, because there was a real upswing of it in the early eighties or mid-eighties and into the nineties. So I began worrying more about that than the oxidation or non-oxidation of polyphenolics.

So I started adding sulfur again when I began working with my Chardonnay at Forman Vineyard. But it's an interesting technique, one I plan on fiddling with again.

Where are we?

The 1979, 1980, and 1981 Wines

Hicke: Well, we've only gotten up to 1979, as far as I know, the summer. When was the first crop?

Forman: The first harvest was '79. We bought Chardonnay, as I mentioned, from Adamson and liked it very much. We bought Cabernet from--oh, where did we buy it from?--oh, some of the Carminé grapes. The Chalone people offered us Cabernet, and we bought some from the Sea Ranch, which is now the Disney property, Silverado Vineyards. We bought Cabernet Franc from the Frediani Vineyards up in Calistoga. We bought some Cabernet from Spotteswood [Winery]. And we bought Merlot from the Silverado Vineyard Ranch, and we bought Merlot from the Narsai David Ranch. We bought Chardonnay also from the Pun Ranch in Rutherford. And we bought Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon from the Polisa Ranch down in Yountville. I think those were pretty much all the grapes we purchased, obviously in the first year.

The '79 wines were pretty attractive, I think. Because of the problems that I later had with Newton and because of the difficulties that the whole project was creating for me in my private life, with my family, my memories of a lot of actual happenings of fermentation, the season, the experiences, the way the wines turned out are not as clear in my mind as times at Sterling or times after Newton.

I would say that one of the most serious problems that I ever encountered with wine--compared perhaps equally to the scope of the problem that we had at Sterling with the smoky tanks--was the catastrophe with the 1980 Cabernet. As I mentioned, we had a very humid cellar, and in 1980 I determined that I wanted to warm the cellar for the completion of malolactic in barrels of the red wine. I also decided that it would be interesting to use glass bungs as I had seen used in Bordeaux.

What I didn't realize was that the humidity and heat and glass bungs, which were constantly in contact with the wine but not creating a tight seal, were posing a very serious threat to the spoilage of the wine from introduction of acetobacter. Within

one week of putting the wine into barrels, which was basically directly after fermentation, I noticed that the cellar every morning had this odd, acetobacter smell. I would look at the bungs and, sure enough, there was a little ring of slime around the bung.

I would immediately every day clean the bungs, thinking that I was dealing with it and that it wasn't getting into the wine. By the second week, the aroma was still there and so I realized I had to deal with this and that I was creating something unnatural in this environment of humidity and heat and using the glass bungs. And so I replaced the bungs, but at that point the wine had already jumped up to almost the legal limit of volatile acidity.

I caught the problem, but I didn't catch it in time. It was sickening to me because the wine was a spectacular wine. The 1980 vintage was going to be--just as the 1970 vintage at Sterling--was going to be a wonderful wine. Because of the rapid production of acetobacter, I actually--well, I think I pretty much almost spoiled the wine.

Hicke: You can't innovate, I think, without having things like that happen.

Forman: Today we have the equipment. We have osmosis filters that could get rid of the VA [volatile acidity] very readily. In fact, I know a lot of wineries who make very, very high quality wines who use these for either dealcoholization or getting rid of the volatile acidity, particularly wineries who age longer than two years in barrels. It's very useful.

That didn't exist then, and I was trying to do some very clever things that backfired on me. I learned a lesson, brutally. Actually, it was in that year that the silicone bungs came out from Europe. Of course, that solved the problem immediately, sealing the barrel very tightly. But it was too late, and it was one of those very sad lessons that I learned.

The wine was not so seriously affected--it was sold in bulk --but it was spoiled to the point where I could recognize it, and I wasn't that proud of it. It was kind of like the '70 Cabernet. It was the second year out. We needed a product to sell; we did bottle it, and a lot of people liked the wine. But we held most of it back. I ended up taking the wine back during the dissolution of our partnership, as part of the settlement of our partnership, and developed a label around it, which I still use today.

I had to take the wine. It was bottled. So I had to call it something. I didn't know what, really, to call it. I wasn't going to put it under Forman. We obviously couldn't put it under Newton. My winery is on Big Rock Road, so I thought, "Well, what'll I call it? I think I'll call it Chateau le Grande Roche, Big Rock." It was cute enough. I developed and designed kind of an attractive label. As I say, I still use it for grapes that I buy.

We sold the wine, and, actually, it became very popular at that point. I sold it at a pretty reasonable price--I think five dollars a bottle. All the places I sold it to, the people actually loved the stuff. So I turned a disadvantage into an advantage by selling it at a reasonable price. It had been in the bottle at that point long enough. It wasn't all that bad. It just wasn't the wine that Newton and I really wanted. It wasn't a disaster wine, but it wasn't our premium wine that we were looking for.

I took it, and I sold it, and forgot about it.

Hicke: It worked.

Forman: But anyway, getting on to further things at Newton: The red wines were fermented in these small tanks, kept separately, put into pretty much all new barrels every years. My racking system that I had developed at Sterling and learned in Bordeaux was used and strictly adhered to: racking out of the head of the barrel, egg-white fining in the barrel. Really nothing too different from what I had done at Sterling.

Dissolving the Partnership

Forman: And I made some very nice wines '79, '81, '82. The wines were really quite delicious. The Merlot was very wonderful. These were all from purchased grapes and really by the time I realized that I had to leave Newton, the grapes that I had planted were just coming on, so I never really got to harvest any of the grapes that I planted. I gather they make quite a nice wine.

Hicke: Did you design the label?

Forman: No, Sua Ha designed the label, Peter's wife. I had nothing to do with the label. Obviously, these were part of the problems. By the time '81 rolled around, we had had two vintages. My wife was pretty fed up with the whole affair, of me having to spend so much

time there. The wine label was supposed to be Forman Vineyard, and Newton decided he didn't want it to be Forman Vineyard; it was going to be Newton Vineyard.

I lived with that, but I also realized that there were other things going on that were not probably going to work out for the better for me.

Hicke: He must have told you that it would be under your label.

Forman: He had. He made a promise. We even had stationery made. It's funny. And then that changed. Well, I could see how he was developing the property and how much money it was costing and that we probably never were going to become profitable, and that the fact that we were never going to become profitable was not a concern to him but obviously it was to me, because if I was to ever really realize the benefits financially from this massive amount of effort that I put into it, it would mean that we would have to become profitable.

I just didn't see it happening. So for better or worse-- there were other things that went on that are not necessarily at this point even necessary to discuss, but obviously, differences arose, and I was no longer comfortable there. And so, in the fall of 1982, just after the harvest of '82, I informed Newton that I no longer wanted to be a partner with him and that I wished to dissolve the partnership and that I wished to extract from the partnership what I felt was my fair share of the partnership, financially.

Unfortunately, he didn't agree that there was anything financial for us to divide. I felt differently, and so the whole affair had to fall into the hands of attorneys, and we struggled with it for a year. And in and amongst that time, my family dissolved, and so there was a period there in 1982 where the family separated, I separated from Newton, and went on my way. It was a very black time, I must say, of my career.

But I didn't let it get me down. We ultimately did resolve the problem in 1983. We didn't leave amicably, unfortunately, but we left. I began consulting and, in the dissolution of my marriage, ended up keeping the property which I now live on and have the winery. And so I began developing Forman Vineyard. Along the way, I consulted for a number of places, most seriously with Charles Shaw Winery.

I ended up beginning and really introducing his white wine programs, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, as well as fine-tuning and perfecting his theme of producing Gamay Beaujolais in the

traditional carbonic fermentation used in Beaujolais. So I worked with him very closely as *the* winemaker for 1982, '83, and '84 harvests.

While so doing, also put together the Woltner Winery, W-o-l-t-n-e-r, for the people who used to own Chateau La Mission Haut Brion, and helped design that winery. Hired Ted Lemon as their actual winemaker, and continued to consult for them. And consulted a bit for Villa Mt. Eden and Inglenook--all the while planting my vineyard--well, my vineyard I actually planted in 1979, when I was at Sterling, so fortunately I had that.

Hicke: Yes. Before we go too far, let's go back to your finding the property because we haven't even talked about that.

Forman: Oh, yes, we haven't even talked about that. So anyway, the Newton period of my life--I'm certain there are other things that could be highlighted, but it was not a happy period of my winemaking career, and it's probably well enough just to leave it at that.

We found the property, I learned a great deal about viticulture, we built a unique underground facility, I produced some wines, had one very unfortunate circumstance with a wine, but also made some very interesting wines--some wonderful Chardonnays. Some of the best Chardonnays I ever made in my career were made there. A very unique Sauvignon Blanc and some very nice Merlots and one or two good vintages of Cabernet. And then it was over.

V FORMAN VINEYARD, 1983 TO PRESENT

Selecting and Developing the Vineyard Property

Forman: But where did I go from there? I consulted and developed my own property. How did I find my own property? I had determined, along with my wife, that we wanted probably to get out of town and have a property in and around the hills of town somewhere.

Hicke: This was in the seventies?

Forman: We began thinking about it in 1976, the year our son was born, Toby. In 1976, while I was still at Sterling, I started looking in the hills. Oh, we'd look all over, all the way from past Calistoga to various places realtors would show us in and around town. I can't remember how I stumbled on this property except that Vern Halley--a really wonderful guy, still a very close friend and realtor in town--suggested that I hike up on what's called today the Woodbridge property but I don't think it had a name. He just said, "Go hike up in those hills above Meadowood Lane, above the town of St. Helena. You'll find some old dirt roads, and see what you think of it. It's not currently for sale, but I think it will be. It's owned by Harry See," of See's Candy, actually, and the first owner of the Silverado Vineyards today. And a guy named Fred Holmes, who was a very interesting guy. I never met him, but he was very interested in the wine business, a partner both of Robert Mondavi and [Joseph] Heitz.

So they owned, as a partnership, this hillside above town. I believe it was four parcels and approximately a hundred acres, about twenty-five acres a parcel. So I did hike up the road and wow! I knew instantly that I had found what I was looking for and that it was exactly what I wanted to develop into a vineyard. I came up this little dirt road, kind of walked through the trees into what had been a meadow, looking carefully at what had obviously also been a vineyard but had grown back into forest and sort of brush land. But everywhere I walked, I looked down and

all I saw were pink sort of pocky stones, volcanic gravel bed, and I thought, Wow, this is very unique.

It was the right color. I love the red-colored soils. They produce really characteristically powerful and long-lived red wines. I saw that the soil was obviously very well drained, that it had beautiful southern exposure, and that obviously someday, somebody in the probably pre-Prohibition days had taken the effort to clear it and probably grown very unique vines, because here and there I could see vines that had rotted trunks, but I could tell by the caliper of the trunk that the vines had flourished.

Hicke: You're demonstrating about six inches in diameter?

Forman: Well, yes. Four to six, yes. They were good-sized trunks. Very well spaced, in the tradition of those days and Europe. Also I realized, by finding a few stakes here and there and could line them up, that they had planted this thing on five by five spacing. I had never seen anything in the Valley that close. The closest I'd ever seen was eight by eight, so five by five spacing was very, very unique. It meant that the soil had to be quite deep, because obviously they never irrigated the soil here.

To get a vineyard out of five by five spacing, to grow vines of this size meant that the soil had to be very well drained and very deep. And to have that combination also on a hillside location spelled quality. It was also a size that I thought I could manage. It looked like it was about five or six acres of plantable land. It was rolling on part of it, and part of it went up and had been terraced, it looked like, with brush growing on all of the terraces.

Hicke: Is this over there? [points out the window]

Forman: Yes, this is that piece, yes. I went after it. Asked the owners, through the realtor, whether they'd sell. They fiddle-faddled around and ultimately said yes, they would sell. I think I bought it in the fall of 1977, at a remarkable price. I paid a little over \$3,000 an acre for twenty-five acres, which is utterly ridiculous today, particularly considering the quality.

And so in '79, while now at Newton, I used the same tractor driver and tractor to clear this piece as I did Newton, so I was planting Newton and this at the same time. Planted it in '79-- again, unfortunately, with AXR. I should have paid attention because the vineyard had been planted with St. George before, and I should have used St. George. Some of the rootstock was still growing even a couple of years ago, when I took the old vineyard out. It survived two vineyards.

So anyway, I planted AXR, because that was the practice in those days, and used the Martha's Vineyard clone Cabernet, which I had also used to plant Newton--I forgot to mention that, but we felt that the Martha's clone was unique. I'll tell you why. This is interesting, too. I never mentioned this. When I was in school, I wanted to plant a vineyard at my parents' summer home up in Grass Valley. I went to [Albert J.] Winkler at the university, and I asked Winkler, "If I were going to plant a vineyard, I'm going to plant it up in the Grass Valley area." He said, "That's probably a pretty good area. It's warm, but it has cool nights, and I'll bet your Cabernet will ripen and it will produce some very good wine."

So he said Cabernet would be recommended. He said, "Why don't you go over to the experiment station in Oakville, and I'll tell you the row numbers. Get the bud wood from there. We're taking it out next year, but," he said, "I think this is very unique Cabernet, and I think it could actually be defined as a Cabernet clone because its characteristics are unique enough. It has very pronounced Cabernet character, it has very good balance, and it has a decent yield. Take it. I like it."

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Forman: Winkler had said the same thing to Barney Rhodes the year previous, and the year previous, Barney Rhodes had taken this fruit and encouraged--what's his name?--Tom May and Martha May to plant the Martha's Vineyard with the same clone, the vineyard that Heitz makes this famous Martha's Vineyard Cabernet from. So we both had taken this on Winkler's recommendation as being a unique clone. Martha's Vineyard was planted, and obviously it produced a spectacular wine.

I planted it some 150 miles away, at a 3,000-foot elevation, up in the foothills of the Sierras. I made only one vintage from it because Winkler was wrong; it was more difficult to ripen than he thought. Also, I didn't have the place properly deer fenced, and one thing and another, and the deer ate it or the birds ate it.

But one vintage, 1973, I did manage to make a barrel of wine from it. And that barrel is the most unique Cabernet I ever made in my life. Amongst its unique characters is its very strong but not obnoxious eucalyptus aroma, very similar to the way the 1929 and the 1945 Mouton and in many cases the Léoville Las-Cases has that unique eucalyptus Cabernet character.

Of course, Martha's Vineyard had this very strong eucalyptus character because it's surrounded by eucalyptus trees. People

always thought that, Ah, that's the only reason Martha's has this eucalyptus character. But I proved that there is a degree of that within the clone by planting it up in the Sierras.

This Cabernet I had with a fellow just before last harvest, 1998--a 1973 wine.

Hicke: You opened a bottle?

Forman: I opened a bottle. I opened it at Tra Vigne Restaurant. He said he had never--and I must say I haven't had it in years--never had such an unusual and incredibly distinct and still youthful Cabernet in his life. The wine, you would have thought--and I had some of the waiters taste it--you would have thought it was Mouton. It still was tannic, it still had bright red color, it still had intense fruit. Unbelievable, unbelievable.

So this vineyard clone, Winkler knew and I knew from the start, was very unique, and I've used it always in my clonal selections. I used it at Newton, I've used it at my Torvilas Vineyard, I used it at the Forman Vineyard. So I did plant the entire Forman Vineyard with Cabernet from this Martha's Vineyard clone, gained through this experience.

The Cabernet Franc I took through a recommendation from Walter Schug that came from virus-free stock at Gallo, which had evidently been a descendent from Bordeaux. The Merlot I took from the Sterling block at Bear Flats, which was originally from Inglenook and which we now know as Clone 3, also a Bordeaux clone. And then Petit Verdot I got from two vines from the mother block at the UC planting of grapes. It was claimed by Olmo to be the true Petit Verdot of France, rather than the Petit Rougienne, which is sort of an off-clone of Petit Verdot.

So I had a relatively good selection in the vineyard here--unfortunately, on AXR, but in this great piece of ground. I remember when we ripped the ground, the rippers went through the soil like it was butter, and the soil just rolled back and cultivated exactly like sugar. It was wonderful soil. When it rained, you'd go out there and you'd never get mud on your feet. It was strictly this light, light, pulverized volcanic rock mixed with this gravel.

I didn't realize how deep it was, but years later I drilled a well at the end of the vineyard and went 260 feet deep through this gravel. It's surrounded by much larger rock of the same material, which draws the heat and it radiates onto this little bowl, which is then surrounded by trees. It's a very pretty little piece. Totally an environment to itself and a soil type

which is fairly unique to this part of the base of Howell Mountain.

Hicke: Did you ever find out who owned the property?

Forman: Dr. Talcott, who lives down the way and grew up here, says that it was an Italian family, but he doesn't know the name. It was Zinfandel. There were a few living vines that had grown up into trees, so it was Zinfandel planted on St. George.

[tape interruption]

Forman: We were kind of finishing up with Newton. We bought this land--

Hicke: And we were taking up Forman Vineyard.

Forman: Yes. So I went ahead and was thrilled about the possibility of buying this land and bought it when I was at Sterling, as I said, and then developed it the first year that I was at Newton, in conjunction with Newton. The same crews were bouncing back and forth, doing this. Unfortunately, I planted it on AXR. Even though the expense of replanting it has been absolutely astronomical--it has cost almost \$40,000 an acre two years ago to replant it--what I have now is what I really want.

I have the proper trellis system, which I'll explain how we came by, and I have the proper clones that I want, including the Martha's. I always have some of that. And yes, the proper density. And I've gotten rid of the terraces, and I have the irrigation system with the right volumes and the right this and that. I mean, the whole thing is the way I want it now. So I'm sorry that it died, and I had to spend so much money. But now that I've redone it, it's going to be a spectacular vineyard that I can hardly wait for. Even the old vineyard made wonderful wines.

So it was exciting in 1979 to finally have my own piece and to plant it, to plant the classic varieties on it, and to do in those days the best I could with the best materials we had. I went along with the vineyard alone. No house, no winery. At that time, no real plan to do so because, after all, I was then just beginning with Newton, and we had what I thought was to be a very exciting project going.

Consulting for Woltner and Charles Shaw

Forman: But clearly, after I realized that Newton and I weren't probably going to get along as partners in the same way that we got along as employer and employee and that ultimately I had to get out of it, I was very happy to have this to fall back on. I couldn't fall back on it as a source of income immediately. It was a source of drain on my income, obviously, because it was in the developmental stages.

This is why I decided that I had to consult and why I joined with the Woltners, whom I had met in Bordeaux. They came out and kind of looked me up and asked if I would help them do their Chardonnay winery up in Anguin, which I didn't agree with, on the variety, but nevertheless, that's what they were set for. That helped out.

Then Charles Shaw, with whom I had been a close friend before and really wanted to get going on a white wine program, was very appropriately timed because that I could join with and have as another source of income to get me by until my own was producing. And then a few other little tidbit consulting jobs, none of which I really liked. I decided that being a consultant, other than at Shaw, was not very gratifying, because you'd go and suggest things and come away finding only that they wouldn't do them as you suggested them.

Or I don't think really I enjoyed telling people what to do. I really liked doing it myself, which is one of the reasons I got away from Sterling. I realized I had come to a point where I had to begin delegating things. We were growing and growing. You can't do it all. But I didn't like the feeling of delegating. I wanted to be there, making sure that it was all done right. I wanted to do the racking. I wanted to see every part of the winery. I just felt better at home with it if I was doing it and really observing it firsthand.

So going to Newton, I thought would be that ability again, gearing back to the small size. And it might have had we gotten along. We didn't get along. So going into my own business was going to satisfy it ultimately, but having to consult in the meantime, again, wasn't terribly satisfying because I couldn't really do what I did best: that's make wine, not tell people how to make wine.

At Shaw it was a little different because I actually went to work there every day and did the cellar work, a lot of it, myself and really pretty much took up where I had left off at either

Newton or Sterling in participating firsthand in all the operations. But sure enough, as time goes on, my property became more and more developed, and I launched in, in 1983, to the full-blown winery and a place to live above the winery, again to be underground.

Hicke: This is your third winery, isn't it?

Forman: Really, yes, exactly. The fourth, considering Woltner.

1983: A Crucial Year

Forman: Of course, between 1979 and '83--well, no, '85, actually, the first vintage I produced at Forman Vineyard, but 1983 I had a second crop--the first crop went to Newton. It was just a token ton with the grapes. It didn't amount to much. But the first real crop from Forman Vineyard actually was crushed at Charles Shaw. That was another nice advantage of working there. He allowed me to bring the grapes there. And so I crushed them there and aged the new wine there for the first year, and it was really very exciting wine. I was absolutely thrilled to see the results of it.

Hicke: This is '83?

Forman: The '83 Cabernet. It still today is just delicious. It's one of my most prized wines. I did not have Petit Verdot then, but I had Cabernet Franc and Merlot. We picked the Cabernet separately and the Franc and Merlot together, fermented it at Shaw, and put it into all new Nadalier barrels, of course. And the wine was absolutely delicious. I was so happy with the results. It actually had some of that Martha's clone eucalyptus tones to it, not obviously overwhelmed with it but just in the right proportions. It was beautifully tannic, with long, soft tannins, and had a gorgeous dark color, and just lively fruitiness. I thought, Wow, I may be able to make it. It gave me the absolute encouragement to know that I wanted to charge ahead, that I had something of value here.

That, coupled with the fact that I was able to buy fruit from the Adamson Vineyard, which I had done so well with at Newton, made me feel confident that I could put a package together slowly but surely that would ultimately take care of me.

Hicke: So that was a crucial year.

Forman: It was very crucial. It was scary. I had stuck my neck out. Spent a lot of money--nobody else's money. I borrowed it. I had none of my own. Having just gone through a divorce, I had given up all my rights to the property in town, so I had nothing to fall back on there. I did get a small amount of money--a very small amount--from the dissolution with Newton. Didn't go very far, but it helped. And then my consulting and a friendly bank got me along.

But all of a sudden realizing what I had in the soil, I wasn't fearful anymore. I knew I'd make it. I had to go through a lot of hoops to get this place. I had to re-zone the property. Everybody said, "Oh, you'll never be able to do that." And I knew somehow that I would because I had to, I wanted to. So I re-zoned it, which would allow for a winery, got the money from the bank, went ahead, built the winery, built the winery the way I wanted, as much as the site would allow.

Building an Efficient and Innovative Winery

Forman: I had, before building the winery, contemplated with the thought of renting a property that I had originally lived on when I moved to the Valley. It's what's called Chabot Ranch. Now Beringer leases the ground, but a woman named Suzanne Bucharaz owns it. I stayed there both when I was with my wife, Joy, when we were first married and moved to the Valley, and then again, quite ironically, when we separated.

Became very friendly with the owner. She's quite a character, I must say. From an old French family. She remembered as a girl running the winery, which was built in the early 1800s on the property. Her grandfather, Chabot, oddly enough, was one of the Chabots from the Bay Area, which is the name my grammar school was named after. That really had a lot of coincidence to it.

But anyway, I liked Suzanne, she liked me, and she said, "Sure, why don't you go ahead and lease this whole winery from me." It was a beautiful winery, a gabled winery, stone bottom, wooden front, which, you might gather, this place now looks like.

And my good friend, Gene Boiadjeff, who I mentioned I was so fond of, this contractor, I came to and said, "Gene, I need to build a septic field out in front of this winery I'm going to lease." He looked at me and, in all of his wisdom, he said, "Ric, there's no way I'm going to build that septic field. It's a bum

idea. What you're going to do is take that money and put it into your own property. Don't be stupid." He just banged my head against the wall and made me realize very quickly that I had to do it on my own. With the knowledge that the grapes were pretty good, I felt confident enough to go to the bank, get the loan, and start this construction.

Gene, of course, was the one that started the project for me, because it required unbelievable excavation. I wanted the winery to look out over the town because the view--you could see, before we had done anything--through the trees was utterly spectacular. It was just as though we were an eagle looking down through the trees over the whole Napa Valley.

Hicke: It is, yes.

Forman: It was a difficult site, but Gene, with his unbelievable foresight into how projects could be done and his great skill--

[tape interruption]

Forman: So Gene, in all his wisdom, knew just how to deal with this site, which I thought had a magnificent view. But I thought, "My God, Gene, this is not a buildable site." "Ah, don't worry, Ric. I'll deal with this. First thing we've got to do is get a tractor out here and see what's underneath this." Well, he brought a tractor out, and one scratch, sounded like--well, it sounded exactly like what it was. His tooth hit solid rock.

Hicke: Ouch!

Forman: There was about six inches of dirt and then solid rock. There was no way, absolutely no way we were going to deal with this piece of property with anything other than dynamite. And so to me, enjoying my explosives, I thought that sounded like a great idea! "What do we do first?" He said, "Well, first we've got to go out and we've got to rent a big dynamite drill, not a little one, a big one. We're going to have to do a lot of holes here. I think I know a guy, though"--at the time, they were putting in a pipeline down the main Silverado Trail. He said, "There's a guy down there that's doing this explosives work. I'm going to get him up here and ask him what to do."

Well, he was a rascal of a guy, I must say. He was not of the best character, but he had the know-how, and we weren't worried about a character reference on the guy; we wanted the job done. So old Bigley came up. Bigley looked at the site and agreed that there was nothing else other than dynamite that was

going to touch it. But we were slightly in awe when he told us how much it was going to take.

He said, "We have to drill, on a grid three feet by three feet on every corner, a hole probably fourteen or fifteen feet deep by three inches wide, and at the bottom of each hole we'll put a stick of dynamite, and we'll fill the hole straight to the top with blasting powder. I'll set it all together so it'll blow off in microseconds apart, and it'll just shove this whole thing right out into the open."

We calculated, and we figured it was going to take 500 holes, so that meant 500 sticks of dynamite. And we pretty much calculated the depth and diameter of the hole and everything and the powder, and it took 1,200 pounds of blasting powder. That's twelve, hundred-pound sacks plus 500 sticks of dynamite. Nothing less than an awesome explosion.

It took us a week to drill these holes. Gene and I got out here, and we hammered and hammered away and hammered away, and finally finished all the drilling. Bigley came out, set all the charges, and unfortunately, I was called away on a trip that I had promised Chuck Shaw I'd go on to New York, to help the Shaw wine, and was unable to be here for the explosion.

Hicke: Oh, no!

Forman: I called. I remember I called, actually, from Connecticut. I said, "Gene, how did it go?" He was practically stuttering in response, saying, "I've never seen anything so awesome in all my life. It was literally like an atomic bomb. There was this massive explosion. The smoke and dust went up in an identical mushroom cloud to the atomic bomb. We were hiding about fifty yards down the road, behind a bucket, and, rock went through one side of the window and out the other of my truck. Stumps, big stumps went flying up, over trees and into other trees. It was utterly unbelievable. But," he said, "it's all shattered. It turned solid rock into boulders and gravel."

So it was quite an exciting event. I came home, having seen a knoll, and now viewed a quarry. It took him about a month to dig it all out. He performed what I consider to be a miracle in getting a rather steeply sloping hillside into a courtyard and a shell to build the bottom floor of the winery, which was to be three sides underground.

Hicke: That work done there--

Forman: That was all solid rock. From the road down, it's all solid. He blew it up, and of course, we have tons of rock now to build walls, which you can see. Everywhere you look, there are stone walls.

Hicke: Yes, it's beautiful.

Forman: We worked at it. I had a wonderful old friend of the family--he was, I think, eighty years old when he designed the building, which I pretty much showed him what I wanted. Took him to see the Villa Ramey Winery.

Hicke: What's his name?

Forman: Oh, Irwin Johnson. Wonderful man from Oakland. He actually just died here a few years ago, about '95. So Irwin designed the house, and he put an unbelievable amount of structure in it. We were on solid rock, and he made me go three feet deep by three feet wide into the solid rock, pour this foundation, pour solid concrete walls all around. And then the face, I faced again with rocks. We ended up with almost three-feet thick walls on the one facing the outside, and the other walls are all underground. It was to be a very well-insulated cellar, and it has proven to be quite easy to maintain good temperature in it, except during harvest, when I have to air condition it because of the fermentation. Even during the summer, it only gets up to about sixty-four [degrees], so it's very nice.

That was exciting. And then I put up a redwood structure, small home above, where I still live.

Hicke: How did you get the garden? Was there enough soil?

Forman: No, there was no soil anywhere.

Hicke: Yes, I thought so.

Forman: I then decided I wanted some water to look at, so we built a pool, and that took sixty sticks of dynamite, and then I needed lawn around, and I love vegetable gardens, as we have mentioned very early in the interview, so I had to have a vegetable garden. I had the guys that were building the stone walls go way out on the edge, build a high, stone retaining wall about six to eight feet high, and then I brought in--around the pool, around the perimeter of the house--for the vegetable garden, twenty-five truck and trailer loads of topsoil. So there's this great topsoil. And then I mixed every year ten or fifteen tons of grape pumice with it, so it's a wonderful garden. It just absolutely grows

everything beautifully. So that's been nice. The landscape finally looks as though the place was always here.

Hicke: It really does.

Forman: But it didn't start that way.

Hicke: But it also fits into the landscape very nicely. It doesn't obtrude.

Forman: Yes, I appreciate the fact that you appreciate that. I remember going to a city council meeting when the rest of the parcels up here were going to be sold and they wanted to subdivide it. I complained that it was a very sensitive area, that it was very delicate, and that it couldn't take more roads, and that many more houses would totally destroy the ambiance and the ecosystem.

One of the engineers, who was really on the other side, I will say, stood up and said, "I have to commend Forman, because there's no place in town that you can see his house. The house is of the right colors, the green metal roof, the terra cotta colored redwood, the stone rock, in and amongst the trees. One would never know the place was there."

We lost of course, and since, there have been three or four other homes built, and they stick out like sore thumbs--from town. But you still can't see my place.

Hicke: Yes, from down there I see some yellow houses?

Forman: Yes, those are the ones that came much later, the Italian villas. It has gotten to be a very expensive neighborhood. My place was--what?--\$65,000 for this thirty-five acres. The parcel across from me now--no agricultural possibilities on it, most of it a straight cliff in the back, all rock; twenty-eight acres--sold for \$1.2 million. Things have changed.

Hicke: You don't ever want to sell this--you can't pay the taxes!

Forman: That's true. Napa Valley land now is probably approaching--if it's good land will approach the common denominator of about \$100,000 an acre.

Hicke: This is for vineyard land?

Forman: Yes, this is what it's coming to. This is where we have finally arrived. And it will get higher. I also suspect that we will not see any more straight vineyards without wineries. I don't think there will be any more just straight growers in the Valley. All

of the growers will either become vintners or all of the growers' lands will be purchased by wineries. It simply doesn't pay anymore to sell grapes. You can't make enough money. It's got to be turned into wine.

[tape interruption]

Equipment

Forman: Let's see. Where shall we go next?

So we built the winery. I moved into the home and winery in 1985. I had my first harvest here. It was very exciting. I bought this beautiful little German Roche crusher, and I bought a Howard membrane press--once used. It had been used in a German wine cellar, but it was only two years old. It was very clean and very nice. I still use it. Maintained very well. It's just like new. And so is the crusher.

Oh, I had a nice, helical must pump, but have since changed to a very innovative type of pump, a peristaltic kind of pump. It works just like the heart, with a tube that is simply massaged with a rolling cylinder. It simply moves the grape must along, and the must itself is never being touched by moving parts. So I find that a great innovation in pumps.

Hicke: Who makes that?

Forman: A couple of Italian producers. Manzini is the name. I have to think about it now that it's not in front of me, but I think it's probably the finest must pump made anywhere in the world. I think my crusher is a very good crusher. I think if I were to buy a new one, and I'm contemplating buying one, the--oh, what's the name of it?--

Hicke: You can fill it in.

Forman: I bought Santa Rosa stainless steel tanks, little 1500-gallon and 1200-gallon tanks, so it was absolutely ideal. I could harvest and fill one tank in one day, five to six tons. Every day, what was picked flowed through the equipment nicely, filled one tank, one tank would fill one row of barrels. Everything that I had designed seemed to flow and fit very nicely so that it really required very little help to run the winery. This is the way I had planned it.

Tunnels

Forman: I didn't have the knowledge of, nor, I think, was even the technology available at the time I built the winery to do tunnels. So I decided at that point that I had to stack barrels in order to make enough wine to be economically feasible. As much as I dreaded stacking barrels, I only went two [barrels] high, with half the cellar being white and half the cellar being red. This worked--let's see. I started in the cellar in 1985--'85, '86, '87--and in '88 Schramsberg had already dug their tunnels and a few other tunnels had been dug. Obviously, the technology was widely known.

I was utterly fascinated with it and realized that somehow I had to have tunnels dug on the property. I wanted to expand a bit. The vineyards were capable of producing a bit more than the cellar would hold. And in between that time, Reg Oliver and I had purchased the Adamson Vineyard, which we now call Rutherford Star. So I owned at that time forty--and we've since purchased another twenty--I have another sixty acres--so I had ample fruit, ample Chardonnay fruit to make more wine.

I really wanted to fill the cellar that I had originally built under the home with strictly Chardonnay, and I wanted to be able to put the red in a separate cellar, keeping the malo separately and keeping the temperature conditions separate. So this tunnel idea kept rattling around in my head.

I went ahead and called--

Hicke: I need to turn it over.

##

Forman: Called Alf Bertleson, who was *the* cave driller at the time. I think there are three or four more now, but he was the only one available then and is still the best of the pack. He said that he could do it. He had the time. We went down and tried to figure out where we'd do it. The only hill that was really available was the hill directly below the winery, which came right off of the vineyard, so it was aesthetically a very nice site.

It worried me that it was so separate from the main cellar until I realized that if we'd dig it at the right angle, we could ultimately end up directly underneath the other cellar, albeit it would be deep, but we'd be directly underneath. And then I conceived of the idea of bringing a well rig in and drilling sort of a dummy well hole, so to speak, a well hole that wasn't going

to produce water but a hole that would go from the current cellar all the way down to the second cellar.

I asked some engineers in town whether they could determine before digging the tunnel what direction the tunnel would have to go and where it would have to end and where we could drill a pipe and would it all connect. They said, "Piece of cake. It just takes math and a good transit." So they came before we dug the tunnel and got way out in the vineyard, viewed way up to the top of the hill at the winery, and came up with their calculations.

When the cave drillers arrived, they said, "All right, go in nine feet, turn so many degrees at so many feet, go for three hundred feet, and you'll be directly under the winery." So we did. I must say it was the most exciting thing I've ever done in my life, drilling the tunnel. It went very quickly. It only took them two months. But it was the most fun I've ever had with a project. It was an adventure to have this incredible machine going at fourteen feet to twenty feet a day inside a mountain, coming directly underneath the other cellar.

I could hardly wait to go back and forth every day to see how they were doing, and go in and see the progress and see this incredible soil that I was digging in, which incidentally made me realize what the vineyard was growing on. We never ran into one rock. Everything was sand and gravel, the gravel being nothing bigger than a hen's egg and all round. So it was clear that this was an uplifted river bed that the vineyard was planted in.

So away they went, and, as I say, it happened quickly. Two months after the total design I had conceived of was fully mined, I brought in the well rig. They dug right where we wanted them, right in a convenient place up in the existing crushing pad.

Hicke: The cellar and everything was already there?

Forman: The cellar was there. And so I said, "All right, drill here." They were still down there, putting finishing touches on the cellar. We had determined about a hundred feet, which is not much for a well rig to dig through. So they dug through this massively hard rock, which of course I had to go through when we blew it up for the building, and then all of a sudden it was like they dropped into a sugar bowl. So forty-five feet of it was hard rock, and then they dropped into this gravel lens that we were digging in below. It was only about five hours into it. We were down in the tunnel, and they said, "I think we're about where you think we should be."

So we went down there--not directly into where they were going to come through, but we were down there. You could begin hearing this crunching noise and this hissing noise. God, it was massively exciting. And then all of a sudden, the noise got louder and louder, and then pretty soon it was just a very loud gush of air blowing out, and the gravel cracked on the ceiling, and out poked the well-drilling rig. Absolutely dead-on where it was supposed to be. I mean, it wasn't even an inch off. It was perfectly placed. So engineering works.

That was so exciting. The whole project at that point I knew worked.

Hicke: What year was this?

Forman: This was 1988. We went ahead and put nice floors into the tunnel and all the proper drainage and all the water, and I put in air lines to rack the wine with air.

Hicke: And barrels are single stacked.

Forman: And the barrels now are single stacked. One hundred barrels long, the length of a football field. It's dazzling to see and marvelous to work with.

Hicke: I appreciate your little tour through there so I can picture it.

Forman: Yes, it's a neat cellar. Actually, it's still one of Alf's favorite tunnels. He has drilled countless tunnels now, miles and miles of them, having started--what?--fifteen years ago. At the rate of ten, fifteen feet a day, you can imagine how many feet of tunnel there are for all these various places. He still thinks this is one of the nicest, probably because I didn't require the ceilings to be quite as high as those who wished to stack barrels, even though I could still stack. And I made the tunnel slightly wider, which gave it a nice, comfortable feel. And I don't stack barrels, so you're looking down this long row of unstacked barrels.

Generally, the people that have tunnels stack barrels on barrel pallets, and pallet upon pallet. They just stuff the cellar and use it as an industrial cavern, whereas mine has a great deal of aesthetics involved in it. It's a very charismatic place to be, with a constant humidity of about 98 percent and constant temperature of 59 degrees. It's close to being ideal.

Hicke: Doesn't Rutherford Hill Winery have tunnels? I remember going there and they made a big deal of these tunnels or caves.

Forman: After they dug my tunnel, they went to Far Niente [Winery]. Then they went to Rutherford, then they went to Sterling, then they did Cuvaison Winery, then they did Clos Pegase [Winery], then they did more of Newton--no, that's right. He refused to do Newton. He said Newton was too difficult to deal with, and so he refused to do Newton. I thought that was very funny.

Hicke: [chuckling] As usual, you had a crowd of people follow you, didn't you?

Forman: Anyway, they dug a lot of tunnels. They're all over. They went over and did the tunnels at Kunde [Estate Winery], and they've done them in Sonoma, they've done them here. Plus, of course, since they started there, there are two other outfits that are digging, so other outfits have come and dug things like the tunnels at Stag's Leap [Wine Cellars] and the tunnels all over.

Schramsberg was the first. He was the pioneer. He was the one who got the guy up here. It was really a great idea of Jack's [Davies] to research having tunnels--old tunnels--both modernized and expanded. I don't know how he came onto this guy, where he discovered him.

I knew where he was. He was up in Grass Valley, actually, in my old stomping grounds, in the mines. In fact, Dale, the operator of the machine for Alf, is a wonderful man, and we had just great times--he and Toby and I--talking about all the mines because he knew them all. He had been in them himself. I guess they had done some exploration work with this machine up there in the gold mines. And he actually lived up there, so he'd go back and forth on the weekends. So that was fun, too, to talk about. We both agreed that both the soil texture and the color reminded us very much of all of the hillsides that you see near Auburn and going over the pass, the Yuba Pass, and so forth, from Grass Valley, where they hydraulic-mined and took so much ore out.

Hicke: [laughing] I was going to ask: Did you find any gold?

Forman: I told Dale that "we ought to have this stuff analyzed." There's a good chance it does have gold in it. I never sent it in for analysis, but it might. I don't know.

Hicke: That's another project.

Forman: I hope it doesn't. Think of what it would do then. Where would we put all the dirt? The dirt was a problem. You have to get rid of this stuff, just massive amounts. I guess we figured we took something like 20,000 yards out of beautiful gravel and sand. I just had it dumped in between the two vineyard sites, on a little

knoll which Gene had prepared for the dumping of this stuff. He moved all these big boulders around and made a plateau, and then we built a mountain on top of it.

I leveled it off. It was gorgeous soil. It was all this sand and gravel. And so I tried planting a vineyard up there, but it just simply wouldn't grow, wouldn't grow, and wouldn't grow. Well, you can imagine soil that's coming from a hundred feet underground. It's completely depleted of nutrients. We analyzed and we added this, and we added that. The vineyard is still there. It's actually now--I've abandoned it. I want to take it out, and I'm going to try olives in its place. But oddly enough, once I abandoned it, the thing started growing because I guess we've added so much nutrient to it, and it has weathered and the pumice we put on it and the leaves that fall are starting to get it into a kind of natural state again.

Hicke: Another couple of centuries and--

Forman: It'll be fine.

Hicke: Great stuff.

Forman: It's fun to plant things, particularly like grapes because it's so porous and sandy.

Hicke: So are you going to plant olives?

Forman: I've got to get now somebody up there to take the vines out because I've hacked them apart so badly now, trying to get them out, and I can't. Now they're fully rooted. It's turning into a real nuisance, but I will take it out, and I think I'm going to try olives. Yes, I think olives might do well up there.

The prune trees that we've planted around the perimeter are now doing beautifully, so I think maybe just the moving and settling for ten years, the soil has changed its chemistry.

Hicke: You planted prune trees. That's a wonderful idea.

Forman: Yes, the prune trees are beautiful to look at. They're thought to--what?--I guess they harbor some wasps that deal with the larvae of the sharpshooter leaf hopper, trying to control Pierce's disease. I don't find it very useful for that, really. I haven't seen any difference. But the prune trees are nice and the prunes are wonderful to eat.

Hicke: And the blossoms--

Forman: And the blossoms are beautiful, so that the whole hill has a perimeter of that. I think olives on top would be very lovely.

Hicke: So look what you got out of that tunnel!

Forman: Oh, we used every crumb of it, every crumb. It's very nice.

Let's stop for a second.

Wines of 1983 to 1986

[Interview 4: March 19, 1999] ##

Hicke: We have covered your starting the winery here, so let's see how it went along.

Forman: We left off some two or three weeks ago--it's hard to remember--but we left off with me discovering this site, wanting to develop a winery of my own, buying the land in '78, planting in '79, and finally building the winery in 1983 and actually moving in in 1985, meaning that I moved into the house, which is above the winery, and I moved into the cellar, actually, in '85, making wine--start to finish.

Previous to that time, I had crushed my grapes at Charles Shaw winery, so the '83 and '84 were actually harvested and crushed and fermented at Shaw. The '83 totally done there, the '84 actually was brought back to this cellar and aged here, and the '85 was crushed here, so the first vintage really here was 1985.

That was very gratifying, I must say. I was finally really on my own. I was finally independent. I had a little vineyard that looked promising. This very, very unique bit of soil was exciting to watch develop. Indeed, I think the '83 wine was looking good about the time I moved in here and started the '85. Of course, the '83 was being bottled. It was reviewed. I remember I was just elated to think that Robert Parker thought it was great and gave it ninety points.

Hicke: Wow!

Forman: From that point on, it was successful. It was a good wine, too, and it still is. I remember putting it in a tasting in the Connoisseur Wine Imports, a blind tasting with a group of people with other Bordeaux wines. Granted, they were '83, which wasn't a

great vintage of Bordeaux, but there were things like Mouton and so forth in there. My wine did very well. In fact, the group actually liked it best. I didn't pick it out. I thought my wine was the Mouton, because it had that really unique, subtle but definitely there sort of eucalyptus Bordeaux Cabernet character--coming, again, from that incredible clone that I took from Martha's Vineyard, having nothing to do with eucalyptus trees, but there's a nuance in there; I'm dead sure of it, just as there is in Mouton and occasionally in Léoville Las-Cases. In the very good years, they do have a subtle, eucalyptus Cabernet sort of character to them, which is, when it's not overdone, really very delightful.

My wine had that, and nobody could believe that that wine was Californian. I thought, Wow, maybe I'm getting there. My dream was to make Bordeaux-style wine in California if I could. The soil being very, very gravelly certainly had something to do with it. The use of Cabernet, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot--well, Petit Verdot hadn't been introduced yet, but that was making a difference. And my technique that I had been developing, patterning after Bordeaux, starting all the way back in the early years at Sterling and really very strictly adhering to here, was lending its effect to the style and character of the wine.

And so I was off and running. I was very excited. I was happy that the results were good right from day one. The '94 vintage came in with very ripe grapes and produced a bit richer wine, but it was tannic and felt good in your mouth and had very nice fruit flavors, and so I had another winner.

Hicke: I think you told me before, but let's just clarify: This is Cabernet?

Forman: Yes, we're talking about Cabernet; we're talking about Cabernet. It's funny: When I talk about wine and get really enthusiastic, it's almost always red. But I guess most people, when they're really into wine, red is the thing that excites them most, even though I spend a great deal of time trying to make a classic white.

Hicke: Is that because of demand?

Forman: No. It's just because when you really like wine, you like red better than white.

Hicke: No, but I meant you're making a white because of demand for that?

Forman: Yes, and I have a good vineyard, and I enjoy making white wine. I have fun making that, too. If I didn't like to make it, I wouldn't make it.

So the '85 came along, and it was a very cool year. The vineyard had gotten rather vigorous, and I was beginning to realize that I had to do something with the trellis system because I was afraid that the fruit was getting too shaded. People enjoyed the '85, and they still do, but to me it was a little too menthol-y, a little too much green-Cabernet character.

Canopy Management

Forman: So we changed the trellis system. We added poles in '86, upright poles, and tried to do an upright trellis system, which did in fact work marvelously. It made a dramatic difference in '86. And we also started leafing the vines to get some sun on the fruit, which was kind of a technique that was just beginning to be investigated in the Napa Valley, as well as, for that matter, in Europe.

Hicke: They hadn't been doing that in Europe?

Forman: No, not really. Europe didn't do it because they have a vertical trellis system, and that's the whole point of a vertical trellis system. It makes a canopy which is generally no wider than about thirteen inches, and that thirteen inches seems to allow a leaf to a leaf-and-a-half coverage for grapes, thereby allowing just the right amount of sunshine, which is so essential, we now realize, for the proper development of all the components that we're after for quality wine, whether it be sugar-acid ratio or the anthocyan and then flavor development.

So I really had a lot of work to do, I could see, in my vineyard, and I was getting there. The introduction of the poles and the vertical trellis system made a big difference. Also, I was realizing at this point that I had to get the grapes a bit riper, and so I was tending to allow them to mature more and more each year, and so you see a progression from '86 right up through --oh, I guess the big break was up into the nineties, when, not only was I doing this but we had these phenomenal string of years, which we've had from '90 right on to present.

Hicke: Weatherwise?

Forman: Weatherwise, yes. And so I think there's quite a change in my wine from '90 going forward versus '90 going back.

Pioneering Introduction of Petit Verdot

Forman: One of the things that made a big difference was the introduction in 1990 of Petit Verdot. That added another dimension of complexity. I guess I was probably the pioneer of Petit Verdot in the Napa Valley or in California, for that matter. I had a hunch. I kept reading the literature and talking to people in Bordeaux about Petit Verdot as a grape to be added to the Bordeaux blend in small percentages.

What did it do? Well, not all but a number of top producers in Bordeaux seemed to like Petit Verdot in small percentages. Even though the university never recommended that I try, I decided I'd better try it.

Hicke: Where did you get the grapes?

Forman: So I bought bud wood, actually, while I was at Newton. I don't remember whether I had to pay for it or whether they gave it to me, but I got it from the university--what they call their mother block, which was bud taken directly from Bordeaux. They had it on two vines, and they would watch it for a series of years and do a lot of tests on it and so forth to determine whether it was infected with any viruses or not. Once it wasn't, they would release it for propagation.

So I took all of the vines--I'm trying to think what the year was, probably 1980--I took all of the bud wood from two vines and planted most of it at Newton's and planted six vines at my place. That's how it worked. So I had six vines right from day one, which is not enough to make any difference in the blend.

And then finally in I think it was 1988 I planted a small vineyard, about three-quarters of an acre, using my wood. Then, by '90, I had some grapes and started introducing Petit Verdot into my wine.

Hicke: In what percentage?

Forman: About 3 to 5 percent. Some years it goes higher. But I've discovered that it was really a variety that I liked. It produced intensely darkly colored wines, with deliciously soft but intense tannins, a really nice tannin structure, and tremendous acidity,

which we I think need in the Napa Valley because we have a relatively warm climate. But the acidity and pH holds up very nicely with Petit Verdot. It has a subtle varietal character, kind of violet-like would be the best way to describe it. And it added a dimension to the wine that I thought was quite dramatic. It really made a difference in every parameter.

I was enthusiastic, and I guess other people realized I was doing it. The word got out that it was interesting, and people were constantly knocking on the door, wanting bud wood, and so I guess my little vineyard has probably supplied all of the current plantings in the Napa Valley of Petit Verdot. It has become very popular. Now everybody who makes Cabernet wants Petit Verdot in their wines. It's funny how these things happen.

[tape interruption]

Hicke: We were just talking about--

Forman: What we did with the Petit Verdot and the introduction of Petit Verdot and how really very nice it is and how other people have caught onto the fact that no longer, I think, would we follow the university's recommendation that it's a variety of no interest in California. It's a variety of immense interest.

Hicke: What does it taste like by itself?

Forman: I actually bottled some by itself in 1990 and again in '91 I did a couple of barrels of it. I haven't looked at it in some time, but I had a chance to do it with my European distributors, who were here about a month ago, and I opened it for them--because the very same question was, "What is it like on its own?" So I said, "I'll go get a bottle." They were astounded with its individuality and its inherent quality on its own. It has really very good structure. It's not hugely distinct varietally, but the structure is so nice. It has this delicious sort of acid-fruit-tannin balance. Its varietal character doesn't confuse Cabernet; it blends nicely with it in that it doesn't override it or it doesn't muddle it or change it dramatically, but it adds the structure.

Hicke: Adds a little backbone?

Forman: Yes. So that's its quality. And I'm sure that's what the Bordelais feel about it as well, and others are now finding that it's quite useful. So, Petit Verdot.

Let's think. Where--

Merlot and Cabernet Franc

Hicke: What about Merlot?

Forman: The Merlot, of course, has always been something of interest to me. You knew from our discussion about Sterling how Newton was convinced that California would be ready for Merlot if someone would just introduce it. We did. Obviously, it caught on, and I've continued to be interested in Merlot. I have a nice selection of Merlot, what we call Clone 3. Oh, it was derived from Wente Brothers and Inglenook, and it was derived by them, we think, directly from Bordeaux. So whether it is one of the clones that now we're calling 181, we're not sure. It has very good character. So I put Clones 3 and 181, which is a direct descendent of Pomerol, in my vineyard.

Hicke: That ought to be good.

Forman: I continue to be enthusiastic about it, both on its own and in the blend. Merlot adds a wonderful dimension to Cabernet. It's got this deliciously spicy fruit. It's close to Cabernet in that it has an herbaceous note to it, but when fully ripe it develops a more subtle, tea-like herbaceousness and a very nice, cherry-kind of character. When it is fully ripe, it has wonderfully long, rich tannins and somewhat low acidity, which is not necessarily sought after, but it does make the wine soft. It broadens Cabernet. It takes some of that vertical leanness out of Cabernet, and so I think it's very useful as a blend.

Cabernet Franc--much like Merlot except that it has a more defined, raspberry-blackberry fruit, and the fruit character is a definite enhancement, both with Merlot as a Merlot blend, and with the blend with Cabernet. It just adds one more component of fruit. It has similar characteristics to Merlot as far as tannin and acid level, but its fruit component is quite unique and very delicious.

So I think they're all beneficial. Malbec I've never played with. Don't know much about it.

Association with David Abreu

Hicke: Tell me about your association with David Abreu.

Forman: Ah, very good. David Abreu. Just to review: he met me at Newton's in about 1980. He was just beginning on his own, trying to get involved in helping people farm land--in other words, becoming a vineyards manager. He really had no formal training, no schooling per se. He worked at Caymus, and he worked at the H&W Ranch, helping out during harvest, helping out in the vineyard.

He comes from a farming background. His whole family grew up in St. Helena, and his father was in the ranching business, so he knew farming from an early age and was very fascinated with the way the wine business was growing. David has a keen sense for looking at something and seeing where it's going to go, and being able to perceive where to be at the right time, so to speak. He's very sharp that way.

I grew to like him. I thought he was an interesting guy, just as friend. We became acquainted. He was fascinated with what I was doing at Newton's; I was fascinated with his farming. I guess our relationship with one another began strictly as friends, and then the more we got involved with asking questions about what each was doing, we became interested in each other's livelihoods. And so I think I was asked by him to really give more than just how-are-you-doing assistance on his projects.

He wanted to get involved with Inglenook, and I knew the people at Inglenook, so he said, "Could you talk to them for me?" And I did. The people at Inglenook said, "We'd be glad to have David farm our ranch, but how about you joining him? And then we'd feel even better." I thought, Well, that's novel. I talked it over with David, and we decided that it wouldn't be too difficult. I could lend some assistance in helping him find some men and so forth, and if that made the Inglenook people feel good, then I'd be glad to do it.

What we didn't know was we ran smack dab into the middle of their labor dispute because David did not have unionized labor force, and of course, Inglenook was. And so we were served with a subpoena to come tell why we weren't using union labor on the Inglenook project. Oh, my God. It turned into an absolute nightmare for us. We had to go to court together, and we had to do all these things.

We finally got out of it, but it cost us a fair amount of money and a lot of strife. David actually continued to run Inglenook. I helped him find another ranch, the Staglin Ranch. Then I got him involved in a ranch that I had then purchased by 1986, along with partners, the Rutherford Star Vineyard, and he

became the manager of that. So by now, he was really getting along with his business.

Coupled with that, we used to like to travel together during the winter, mainly to Mexico to get warm. But we decided one year to go to Europe, and so I brought him through the Bordeaux district, and he was so fascinated with the way it all was done that we made a pledge to keep coming back and really do a hard study of the whole thing together. And we did.

So he slowly evolved from the normal practices used in the Napa Valley to really investigating and experimenting with some of his customers more Bordelais techniques of farming. We started planting grapes closer, we started using the vertical trellis systems that they were using in Bordeaux, we began getting, of course, the rootstocks along with everybody else that they were using there, the right clones.

David is not slow at getting where he wants to go, and he became noted for doing this kind of farming. Everyone was interested. And so his client base started growing, and growing with the really upper-end vineyards. He now farms for people like Harlan, Araujo, Staglin, Cogan, my vineyard at Star--pretty much all the really high-end vineyards, David is now farming. He has a labor base of about a hundred employees, so he has really gone somewhere with this business. He's noted as probably the highest-quality vineyard manager in the Valley. So it's exciting for him.

Hicke: You're still working with him?

Forman: I dropped out long ago. Right after Inglenook, I dropped out. No, no, he has totally his own operation. But we stay associated, of course, as friends. But we also got involved in another way. I guess it was 1988. He asked if I would be willing to make some wine from a vineyard that he owns called the Madrona Ranch. I said sure, I could do that. And have done it ever since. I make a wine that he calls Abreu Vineyards Cabernet. It comes from the Madrona Ranch, which he owns with the Meyer family. It has become very famous as well. In fact, it's one of the most highly sought after wines now in the state. It's all made here at Forman Vineyard.

Hicke: As long as you had nothing else to do!

Forman: Exactly. I think he probably will abandon the site as the site to have his wine made soon, because he's acquiring more vineyards and really has the desire to have a winery of his own. I'm restricting him to about 500 cases, which is all I have space for. So he will in the near future, I'm sure, build his own little

facility. He has learned a lot not only about how to farm land through some of my assistance and his own keen insight, but also how to make wine, and so I think he could probably manage very nicely even making wine--not totally on his own, but pretty much on his own.

So that's David.

Rutherford Star Vineyard--Chardonnay

Hicke: Rutherford Star.

Forman: Rutherford Star I bought with Reg Oliver and a group of partners in 1986, I believe, we bought that. It's a now sixty-acre vineyard in Rutherford, right behind La Luna Market. It's a wonderful piece of ground for Chardonnay, and it's actually fairly good for Cabernet, although I don't use the Cabernet often. I use it when I have low yields in the vineyard or in years that I think the fruit is going to get very good and ripe. But I don't use it every year.

The Chardonnay has been exciting ever since the first wine I made from it when we were buying grapes from the previous owner that we bought the property from--that being 1980 at Newton when we purchased this Chardonnay, and it made an extraordinary wine, wine that's still very viable and delicious. The '81 is equally as nice. The '82 I don't know what happened to. I can't remember. That was the year I left, so probably it's why I forget. In fact, I don't even think I bottled it. I didn't.

The Rutherford Star has proved to be a great source for me for Chardonnay.

Hicke: Are you bottling under a vineyard-designated label?

Forman: I don't vineyard-designate it, no. But my Chardonnay is, oh, post-1986, when I was still buying a bit from the Talcott Vineyard, right below the winery. Starting in 1987, it has been 100 percent Star every year. And I like it. David keeps thinking that I should find sources other than that, but I'm satisfied with it. It has a track record, people recognize the style, they recognize what I do with it--which is something we can talk about in a minute--and so I'm just probably going to stay with it.

Plus the fact I like to estate-bottle all of the Forman Vineyard wines, and if I were to buy grapes, I couldn't do that,

so that's, I'm sure, where my Chardonnay will be for some time. There are some old blocks on AXR we're slowly replanting, so I think we can keep up with the phylloxera and still have supply for me. Others buy the grapes. I don't use the whole vineyard. We sell to Sterling and Merryvale. But there's always enough for me.

And El Molino, which is my partner, Reg Oliver's little winery, also uses the fruit for his Chardonnay, exclusively. So he and I make 100 percent Star Chardonnay in our two wineries.

The wine from the Chardonnay ever since 1980 has been distinct in that it has a wonderful green-apple, and when it's fully ripe that crème brûlée, Chardonnay nose. As I think we previously discussed, I'm opposed to malolactic on Chardonnay in the Napa Valley, at least north of Carneros. I don't think there's enough acidity to support a malolactic, and so I've never allowed malolactic to take place in the wine.

Very traditional otherwise. Fifty percent new, French oak barrels. I started using Sereau at Sterling. Used Francois Frere later on at Sterling. At Newton, used almost exclusively Francois Frere. Used Francois Frere barrels at Forman, then began experimenting with others, and now have gone back to 100 percent Francois Frere barrels, because I think they just are the most suitable with the Star fruit.

The fruit is harvested fairly ripe, which I believe is essential for Chardonnay. The only thing I'm against in harvesting it so ripe is the fact that it has all this alcohol--approaching 14 percent. I dislike that aspect. But the flavors aren't there unless it is ripe, so I harvest it ripe. Very simple treatment: crushed, pressed, and the juice settled overnight, and the juice goes right into 50 percent new, 50 percent one-year used Francois [Frere] barrels for fermentation. The wine is left with the lees all the way up until April, so it never comes out of the barrel until April.

The lees are stirred, up through February. Comes out, and it's fined with isinglass and bentonite in April, and right back to the barrel the next day. And then racked the day before bottling with one filtration. So really minimal treatment.

The wine is being made with really three factors: the vineyard, the fact that there's no malo, and the Francois Frere barrels. I suppose four factors: the sur lees has a big influence on the flavor as well. The effect is that the wine comes off at all stages of development with a wonderful mineral-y quality that you rarely see in California Chardonnay, probably because you

rarely see California Chardonnay that hasn't gone through malolactic.

But with the no malolactic, the acidity is left, and with it, that delightful French sort of mineral-y quality.

Hicke: So it's more like Burgundy?

Forman: Well, it is. But, of course, Burgundy always goes through malo, but they have a better acid level and pH than we do, and they can manage it.

The wine is tight when it's first bottled. It requires probably a minimum of a year before it's looking the way most California Chardonnay looks when it's first bottled because of the malo. Really, it takes almost four years before the wine reaches its--I wouldn't say peak because it continues to develop after that, but a really proper level of what the wine can show. At four years and beyond, the richness that the wine takes on from bottle age is really pretty equivalent to that fairly rich character that most of the California Chardonnays are getting with malo at an early age.

The beauty, I think, of mine is that not only does it have the richness but it also has that, again, good acidity and mineral-y quality, and so it still is a delicious wine with food, and it's not so cloying. I find that most California Chardonnays now, because of this Kendall-Jackson sugar thing, which we went into earlier on in the interview, and because of the strong use of too much new wood and grapes that are too ripe and full malo, the Chardonnays are, I find, almost gagging. They're cloyingly rich. They're too sweet. They're too heavy. They're just overwhelming. They do enthuse wine writers. They stand out in a lineup of wines. They bowl you over. But are they really balanced? I don't find it so, so I've tried to stay away from that.

My wine has a group of followers who appreciate that style. I don't think that the person that likes the full-blown Chardonnay is probably not as wound up with my style as they would be.

Hicke: Yours is a little more austere?

Forman: Mine's austere. In fact, it has almost been said--or it has been said on a few occasions that my Chardonnay would be the Chablis of California. I wouldn't put it that light.

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Hicke: Do you mean the Chablis that we talk about here or the kind from France?

Forman: No, no, the kind from France. Oh, no, definitely. In fact, I don't drink much Chardonnay, but when I do, it's almost always Chablis, French Chablis. That's the kind of Chardonnay I like, that highly mineral, low pH, tart, sort of stony fruit character I find very refreshing and very exciting, as opposed to that thick, heavy, caramel-y, buttery California style. That's my taste. That isn't saying that I think these are bad wines. They don't appeal to me. Just like chocolate appeals to some and vanilla to others. I don't like it.

So I tend to try to make wine at least somewhat in the style that I like, although, being of course aware that I have to sell it in California, and so--well, it would be impossible almost to make Chablis-style wines here anyway. Our climate is too warm, and we don't have limestone, so we couldn't do it. But if I were to really do it, I would be picking green grapes, and I don't think it would be very appealing.

I do the best I can with the style I'd like to do in a climate that's a little marginal, really, for Chardonnay. And then doing so, it has proven to be a nice wine. I know the '85, for instance--again mentioning these Europeans who came here a month ago. They tasted the '85 in magnum, and they absolutely couldn't believe not only the color but the incredible flavor. It was like an old Meursault that had the color, still, of a brand-new Chardonnay. It hadn't oxidized in the slightest. But it developed that deliciously long, sort of hazelnut, crème brûlée, toasty character that you get out of Chardonnay that's properly balanced.

Hicke: How long will that last?

Forman: I have no idea. The '84 is still viable, and that's the only one I have. The '80 and '81 Newton--in fact, there was a tasting. Maybe it does have something to do with the way I make it, because there was a tasting three nights ago at the Culinary Academy of the 1977 Sterling Chardonnay and the '73 Merlot, and the Sterling Chardonnay was still very drinkable. I wouldn't say that it was young, still. But it wasn't gone. It was interesting, and it was powerful.

Hicke: Amazing!

Forman: The '73 Merlot was superb. It still had bright fruit and delicious. I find that in my cellar, too: '73 Sterling Merlots is a phenomenon. So is the '72. I don't know. It might have

something to do with winemaking technique. I always think it's more fruit than winemaking, but one doesn't know.

Hicke: It takes both, I'm sure.

Forman: Well, a little guidance, let's hope.

Forman Wine Library

Hicke: Since you mentioned your wine library, is this a good time to talk about that?

Forman: Sure. We've talked a little bit about some of my styles of winemaking and where we're going. I think in a moment we'll discuss the fact that my vineyard got phylloxera, and I've replanted it, and how I've replanted it, what I anticipate the future of it will be.

Wine library. What do I keep, you mean?

Hicke: That was one of the topics you wanted to talk about, so I'll leave it to you. Maybe that's a good question: What do you keep?

Forman: I put some wine away each year, of course, as anybody would in the business. I don't keep a lot: fifteen, twenty cases of each vintage. I've got them going back, of course, to day one, like '83. The '83 Cabernet is still very drinkable, the one I mentioned a few moments ago that was in that tasting, right after its release.

Hicke: How often do you open a bottle?

Forman: I don't drink the older ones too often. To tell you the truth, I don't get a lot of pleasure--I get pleasure, but I don't open them strictly for pleasure, because I realize what's going to happen is I'm going to sit there and analyze them and fidget, thinking about them. So I make other wines for myself under the Chateau le Grande Roche label. I have a lot of fun. I gave you some.

Hicke: It was wonderful. We really did enjoy it.

Forman: Did I give you the Rosé or the Days Off?

Hicke: You gave me one of each.

Forman: Oh, good, good. With Days Off--you see, this gets back to my Chardonnay. I can't find much California Chardonnay that really appeals to me, not because it's bad wine but because it's too rich. This is why I drink Chablis. I must have gone through fifteen cases in the last two or three years of my favorite Chablis, because my distributor in California sells it. In fact, he told the fellow--and I visited the guy, too--how much I was drinking of it, and the guy was overwhelmed to think that a California wine producer, who produces Chardonnay, no less, was using his Chablis as his standard house wine. They got a big kick out of that.

I made a wine this year under my Grande Roche label, which I do mostly just for my own pleasure and for fun, although I had to make so much this year I'll have to sell it, but I found some old-vine French Columbard, which is like finding hen's teeth because, obviously, in this expensive place for growing grapes you don't have French Columbard anymore, but this is an old, old vineyard, head-pruned, low yielding, beautiful vineyard. I got it early and kind of helped manage the vineyard so that it turned out all right.

The grapes were beautiful--harvested at about a little over 20 sugar so the alcohol is around 11-1/2, very high-acidity, bone-dry wine. It's, to me, just delicious. This is what I like in white wine. I thought, What am I going to call it? Nobody will buy French Columbard, so I thought, Days Off, the days we don't drink Chardonnay, so we called it Days Off. That's where it comes from. These are the wines I like. A white wine, for some reason or other, to me, doesn't have to be serious. It can be something that we simply enjoy.

Red wine, on the other hand, I like more serious. I like Beaujolais, and Beaujolais is not serious; Beaujolais is for fun. And I love it. But the fancy varieties definitely are fancy, and one has to take them a little more seriously. This is back to why I don't like drinking my Forman Vineyard label: because I have to think about it too much. It's a little nerve-wracking.

Hicke: So you open that when you just want to see what it's like?

Forman: I open it because I want to see it, or I open it when somebody else wants to see it, or I use it for vertical tastings or one thing and another. You have to have some. So that's what the library is all about. I keep it in the tunnel, where it's 98 percent humidity, so I have to put bin cards on the slots, because the labels are all black. But it's a great place to store wine. It's a marvelous tunnel.

VI EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC TASTES AND WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES

Chardonnay

Hicke: You wanted to talk about the concept of market and changing tastes. Maybe those go together?

Forman: Yes, they kind of do. Where are we in the market? This might be fun just for you and me to talk rather than me strictly talking about where you see the market and where I might see the market. You've been drinking wine for a number of years, I gather.

Hicke: Since we moved to California.

Forman: Chardonnay. Let's begin with that. Chardonnay is a phenomenon that's developed really only since--well, I was making Chardonnay at Stony Hill in 1967.

Hicke: That was really early.

Forman: That was early. They started in '52, and nobody even knew that Chardonnay existed in California. I mean, Fred McCrea really produced one of the first Chardonnays--he and Lee Stewart, I think, and Joe Heitz started making Chardonnay in the late fifties, early sixties. People were fascinated with it, but the only people that were really fascinated with it were people who had traveled to Europe and knew European wine. But the crowds out there, you'd say "Chardonnay" and you'd think you were speaking a foreign language. They would never know.

But it slowly came around. Of course, Kendall-Jackson, I think, helped catapult it into the arena with its sweet Chardonnay. I don't know what really got it going.

Hicke: I don't know which came first, but as I recall, people started drinking white wine instead of martinis.

Forman: Yes, I guess that was it. Then somebody decided maybe we should upgrade it. Instead of the old Chablis-style, Rhine-style wines that we were getting from the bulk producers, we could do varietal wines.

Hicke: I used to drink vermouth, I remember, before white wine became popular.

Forman: I love vermouth, yes. I love dry vermouth. I think it's a delicious drink over ice. It's wonderful. I quite agree with you. That's rare, though. People would not do that, I don't think.

But where has Chardonnay gone? Chardonnay started by being a very honest white wine. It was almost always fermented in stainless steel. It had good balance because we weren't harvesting it terribly ripe. It wasn't as distinctly varietal in character as it is today because we weren't harvesting it ripe enough, but it was a very honest, clean wine that was above the level of quality and interest of the other white bulk wines that were being offered.

I guess Chardonnay came first and then Sauvignon Blanc was really popularized by Bob Mondavi in the mid-sixties. Those were the two varieties that were interesting. Riesling was being made by a handful of producers, but it was sweet, and it wasn't too interesting then and still isn't. Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay really caught on by the mid-sixties. As I say, I think Mondavi totally is responsible for having Sauvignon Blanc popularized, with his coining the name "Fumé Blanc."

But what has happened to Chardonnay? Well, it has gone from stainless steel to barrel fermentation. As I mentioned, Dick Graff and I were some of the first to experiment with barrel fermentation when we introduced French barrels into California. So I think the Chalone Winery and Sterling had a lot to do with people being fascinated with wine fermented in barrels.

At the same time, I think Bob Mondavi was experimenting with fermenting Chardonnay in barrels, because I know when I was there we did it. And so, between Freemark Abbey, Bob Mondavi at Mondavi, and Sterling and Chalone, we all kind of began this notion that Chardonnay fermented in barrels had some merit. Of course, that was a big enough sampling so that people indeed liked it. Wine writers weren't a thing, really, at that time, so it really had to spread by the individual winery's advertising and by people liking it.

Slowly but surely, more wineries came onto the scene and with them, wine writers. Wine writers started talking about these concepts of barrel fermentation and so forth, and I think it really snowballed. People got used to the flavor of oak. I think it was overwhelming in the beginning, but people kind of got used to it, and they thought that was neat and it was sophisticated.

So barrels quickly spread to every winery that made Chardonnay. And, of course, wineries were opening up by the dozens every month, and everybody wanted to make barrel-fermented Chardonnay by the time 1975 came around. Between '75 and '85, it was like: how else do you make Chardonnay? Of course you make it in barrels. Of course you do malolactic.

So there we are. And then Kendall-Jackson came along around '85 and introduced Chardonnay with sugar, and that appealed to even more. Then all of a sudden, the whole Chardonnay program was split in two. There were the really fancy, barrel-fermented Chardonnays, and there were the so-called fancy Chardonnays that have residual sugar in them. When you look at most of the large producers of medium-priced Chardonnay, you'll always find them with a little sugar in them.

Hicke: Is that right?

Forman: Yes. It's just a flavor people now recognize. They're associating sugar with this richness that comes out of barrel fermentation and malolactic.

Hicke: It doesn't announce that on the label.

Forman: Both of them make the wine sweet tasting. So I think that's where Chardonnay has landed. I would hope that people will begin to realize that it isn't essential that all the times wine go through malo and that they be so rich and so heavy and that they will slowly, as they did in the seventies, be weaned from these high-alcohol Zinfandels, which [chuckling], interestingly enough, we're getting back into again. And they'll want wines that have better balance.

That happens as you get more sophisticated. The more wine you drink, the less you want to drink these heavy-handed wines and the more you want a little something to reach for, and you want subtleties and balance in your wine instead of the heavy-handed, knock-you-over-the-head stuff.

The wine writers really are promoting most of this. People still in America aren't sure of themselves as far as drinking wine. The minute they get enthusiastic about wine, the first

thing they do is turn to one of the wine reviews, and the wine reviews, of course, are promoting bigger is better. So it's going to be a while before people get out of that habit and trust their own palates.

Hicke: Why are the wine writers promoting big?

Forman: Because they think big is dazzling, and also, I suppose, you've got to realize that these guys are tasting hundreds of wines in a day, or at least a hundred wines. I don't know if you've tasted wines, but I'm a professional, as any other winemaker, and eight wines is about all I can do a really good job on. The minute you get twenty or thirty or forty lined up, obviously what's going to hit you is--

Hicke: Big.

Forman: Yes. The only thing you're going to really be able to determine is what stands out with the most of whatever: the most body, the most color, the most nose, the most oak, the most something. And then they get all wrapped up in it. A couple of the really important ones are very fond of this flavor. They're just excited about these massive what I call rather obtuse wines. They say wonderful things about them, that these are the magical, unusual wines, and people seek them out. They're overwhelmed with them. They taste it and, of course, the power of suggestion says to them, "God, he's right. This thing is phenomenal. What an incredible wine!"

Does it go with a meal? No. Does 16 percent Zinfandel really go with a meal? But isn't it still called table wine? They're show wines. They're something to be dazzled with and to be excited about. But they aren't really, I think, what the fruit was intended to be. Well, that's not the case, either. It's intended to be whatever it wants. But I think if you're going to drink wine on a regular basis and have it accompany a meal, I think you'll become tired of these really, really heavy-handed wines. On occasion, I guess they're fun.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Hicke: Maybe you could go through Cabernet the same as you did with the Chardonnay.

Forman: How I produce Cabernet?

Hicke: Well, sort of how it has evolved.

Forman: Yes, of course. Cabernet has been here for a lot longer than Chardonnay, I think, mainly because of the reputation that Beaulieu probably gave it. I mean, Beaulieu and Inglenook. Beaulieu and Inglenook were making wonderful wines.

Hicke: Is that Tchelistcheff?

Forman: Yes, Tchelistcheff. In the forties. Those wines are still--some of them are still viable. The Napa Valley started growing Cabernet probably in the forties. Those two producers did an incredible job of classic winemaking with the variety, and the Valley is so well suited to Cabernet that you almost can't miss. But they on top of it all had very good vineyards and knowledgeable people making the wine.

Cabernet was known through the efforts of Beaulieu, probably Inglenook, to a somewhat lesser extent Charles Krug, and Wente in the Livermore Valley, and Concannon in the Livermore Valley. I'm trying to think of who else was, back in those early days, producing great wines from Cabernet. I'm sure there are some. I just can't think of them.

And then, of course, by the sixties we had Mondavi again coming on the scene, Clos du Val, Sterling, Freemark Abbey, and all of a sudden, new people were arriving. There had been a few other producers. Heitz certainly was very important earlier than these. Souverain was an important producer. I don't know why, but the world just knew about Cabernet from the Napa Valley. I guess because of Beaulieu. I can't think of any other reason, really, because it wasn't really written about. But Beaulieu had developed such a wonderful reputation that it was classic, and people associated Cabernet right from the forties on with the Napa Valley, and so when new producers came along, Cabernet was easily accepted.

Cabernet wasn't really twisted around in such a fashion as Chardonnay has been twisted around. Cabernet still is being made classically. In fact, it's probably being made more classically. Beaulieu always used American oak. The newer producers were using the barrels that Sterling, Dick and I were selling and some of the barrels that Robert Mondavi was importing from Demptos. So the introduction of French barrels, Bordeaux barrels, in the late sixties and early seventies was probably the most important thing that altered Cabernet slightly from its previous standards of production at the other wineries.

But then, I think, people were concentrating more on viticulture, realizing that low yields were important. We were opening up new areas. Some of the old hillside vineyards that had old varieties--Petite Sirah and things that had been abandoned were opened up. This was exciting. New people were buying old wineries. Like, the Araujos would buy the Eisele Vineyard, and Phelps came along and bought some fancy land, and Freemark Abbey would promote the Bosché Vineyard. Sterling opened up the Diamond Mountain Ranch up in the hills there.

So all of this slowly took place, and before you knew it, we had instead of four main producers, we had forty producers, many of them with wonderful new vineyards, adding Merlot to the wines at the lead of Sterling; adding Cabernet Franc finally in the end of the seventies. Not until the nineties did we introduce Petit Verdot, but paying attention to what was done in Bordeaux.

Cabernet has reached unbelievable heights of quality in the Napa Valley, so much so that it challenges Cabernet made anywhere in the world, including the great Cabernets made in Bordeaux. I don't think they taste necessarily like Bordeaux, but they have the same quality. They have perhaps more richness because of our ability to achieve full ripeness here, but the quality of some of the top, say, forty producers in California of Cabernet is as good as any wine made in the world.

So we've really come a long ways with all of the aspects of growing and winemaking.

Hicke: What about your own methods?

Forman: As we mentioned earlier, I've been a strict, sort of classical producer in the sense of traditional methods, gained through my visits and insight and studying in Bordeaux. I was convinced that, certainly, the area and the grape clones and varieties and soil and climate, by and large, made a big difference in why Bordeaux wine tasted the way it did.

But I was also fascinated and felt that at least a part of that quality had to do with how the wine was made, and so I paid close attention and came home and at Sterling started using these techniques. Again, the French barrels played a big part--how the barrels were used. A lot of people in the early days didn't understand how to use the barrels. They would put clean wine in the new barrels. They didn't know how to wash the barrels out, and they wondered why the wine instantly turned just so oak-y they couldn't get near it.

I was willing to take chances and put unfiltered or unsettled wine into new barrels, and the results were good. I believe that more general intervention into the wine handling was important, so I adopted the technique of barrel-to-barrel racking with air pressure, rather than using pumps. That was important, and I think that added a subtle difference to the quality.

I was fascinated with the egg-white fining technique and thought that it would probably work well in barrels, as opposed to big tanks, and so I introduced egg-white fining in barrels. I think that added a slight factor of quality to the wine.

What else? I think the blending of Merlot, Franc, Cabernet, and Petit Verdot was a big step forward as far as complexity is concerned in California. And then also concentrating on the specific little vineyards, which had nuances of quality that were distinct and worth capturing and leaving on their own, rather than mass blending a number of vineyards for a standard quality every year had a big effect, and it certainly did at Sterling, as it has at my winery here.

Vineyard Management Tools

Forman: I think one of the things that we're doing now that we didn't do quite as rigorously or didn't quite understand in the sixties and seventies is the level of maturity and the crop level and the trellising systems that are necessary to produce ultimate quality off of some of these already fantastic pieces of soil. We talked a little bit earlier about the introduction of vertical trellises. I think that's having a big effect.

We now know, through the university's studies and through what they've done in Bordeaux and through our experiences, that sunlight is important in how it plays on the leaf surface of the vines and on the fruit itself. We're spending a great deal of money designing trellis systems to maximize the effect of light on the fruit. We're realizing that you can't just put huge amounts of crop on a vine. In that vein, we're cutting back on crop load and actually adding density to vineyards so that single vines don't have to carry such a huge load of fruit. We've gone from the normal 400 vines to the acre up to as much as 2,000 vines to the acre.

We've added vertical trellises. We're using, where necessary, leafing techniques to expose fruit to more sunlight. The crops have come from the eight tons to the acre down to three

tons to the acre. Judicial use of fertilizers and/or drip irrigation has made a big difference. You can control the conditions of the vine. More fine tuning with drip than you had with sprinkler irrigation, which caused problems with mildew and so forth.

Then realizing that this fruit, if it's going to have that deliciously rich character that we're after, has to be fully mature. We're understanding the tannin structure of wines, and the level of maturity that's necessary to produce this soft tannin and supple fruit character out of the wine, as opposed to the kind of hard, green tannins that you'd get if you picked Cabernet too under-ripe.

I think the wines have taken a major step in quality because of all of this, in the last probably five to eight years.

Forman Vineyard: Present and Future

Hicke: You wanted to finish with where you saw Forman Vineyard going, especially what your son's ideas are and where you saw the industry going.

Forman: Okay. Well, I've been making wine for thirty-two years. I'm certainly not running out of steam, but I would like some assistance, I think. It's hard for me to do that. I never really could delegate things too readily in any place I've worked-- Newton, Sterling or certainly here. And here it's gone in the reverse. At Sterling at least I had a cellar crew, which obviously one had to have with a capacity that big. But I came here and I have no cellar crew. I do hire people to help me when I have a job, but I do an awful lot of it on my own. I'm thinking that at some point I've got to have an assistant here to do some of the things.

It's fortunate that my son, Toby, who is only twenty-two years old and still in school, is really interested in the business. I think what would be fun--because he's very mechanical and he's very excited about farming. He's interested in the winery, but to a lesser degree in the winery; he's more interested in viticulture. I would be interested in having Toby--and he's very excited about it--develop a small farming company whereby he could take on small vineyards.

I don't think he's anxious to do a huge operation in the way that David Abreu does, but have a small team of people and do some

small vineyards--take care of them in a very meticulous fashion, and then also take care of my vineyard, which would be so nice, to have a permanent crew that I could consistently count on--not that I don't with David, but I think it would be important as time goes on to have a crew that is really mine--run the vineyard and have Toby be able to take care of that crew and to allow the crew enough to do to take on a few satellite properties. That would be the answer to a prayer for me. It would be wonderful.

And then I would envision training this crew to actually work in the cellar when cellar work was needed, so that they were ongoing, knowing how the process goes, and Toby could watch over them and help, and I would then get relieved from some of the pressure of doing so much of it on my own, by myself.

And then I carried it a step further and I talked with Toby. I said, "You know, what would happen if we did sort of like what Christian Moueix does in Bordeaux, different than him in the fact that he owns all of the properties that he manages, but the same in the way that he manages the properties. Suppose we went to these little producers of vineyards and said to them, 'It doesn't make much sense for you all to sell grapes anymore'"--and that's another point that we can make: I don't think in the future you will see any straight farmer--how shall we term it?--people farming land and selling grapes. I think farmers will all be vintners because you can't make enough money farming grapes anymore.

So we go to these little people who are buying these small properties and say, "We'll manage your vineyard for you, but also we'll help design--which I'm very capable of and have fun doing--design a small winery for you, and we'll manage the winery as well. Our crew can go from one place to the next, run your little two-, three-, four-thousand-case winery, run your little vineyard." I would supervise the people that we choose. We'd have to have a pretty good winemaker involved on the team.

I think it could be a very interesting business that Toby could grow with, I could have fun with, they could come back and do the physical work here, and I could do, finally, just the mental work of making sure that all was going right and how it all will run. I see that perhaps as the evolution of Forman Vineyard.

As far as making more wine, we have space because I like space. I've developed a large space to make a small quantity of wine. You've been through the cellars. You've seen no barrels stacked. Everything I have is one barrel high. In the tunnels, a hundred barrels long and not one barrel on top of each other. So I could double the capacity of the winery, but I don't really

think I'd want to do that. I think I'd rather keep the winery as it is, perhaps grow it to the point of maybe 10 to 20 percent more and leave it at that, and instead, grow the business as it sees fit, with Toby's capacity to grow it with a management team.

Hicke: Would you envision most of this being in the Napa Valley?

Forman: Oh, I think it would all be in the Napa Valley. Yes, I wouldn't go outside the Napa Valley. You have a lot of people who have moved to the Valley whose dream is to run this little winery and vineyard. They're just dying to do it. They're lined up in long lines, literally, and will pay anything to get into this situation. And so you will see these little places. They're going to pay dearly for it, but they're also going to want it managed properly. And they won't want to just sell grapes; they all want to make wine ultimately, maybe a thousand cases, two thousand cases. And that could be done.

We, I think, could do a very good job for them, and they would have a lot of fun with it. So it's an idea. Where it will go, I don't know. It all depends on Toby--if he wants to, it will; if he doesn't, it's fine. We won't do it. I can manage this and eventually hire some people to run it when I get tired of running it and have it run perfectly.

Wine Industry Overview

Hicke: Okay, what about the industry?

Forman: Where will the industry go? I think I touched on that in saying that I don't think you're going to see many growers as strict growers anymore. I think you're going to see totally, every vineyard owned and operated by a winery.

Hicke: And that's, again, in the Napa Valley.

Forman: In the Napa Valley, but I think you'll see it spread probably, as things happen. It goes from the Napa Valley to the Sonoma Valley, there and beyond. We're discovering that the price of labor and, as we go from wide-spaced vineyards to tightly spaced vineyards, that the cost of farming is so high that you can't charge enough for the fruit to justify the farming costs anymore. It simply doesn't work. David and I have the Thorvilos Vineyard, which we own in conjunction together, above the winery. It's a beautiful vineyard--close spaced, vertically trellised--and it costs us close to \$12,000 an acre a year to run it.

You can charge \$5,000 a ton, but the people that are going to pay \$5,000 a ton don't want it grown at more than three tons to the acre, and so \$3,000 an acre isn't very exciting to take the risks--

Hicke: There's a little disparity there.

Forman: Yes, to take the risks that you take, it doesn't make sense. So we don't know what we're going to do with it. We're contemplating forming a winery around Thorvilos. I really don't want to do that, but it's crazy. We can't make any money farming it. And everybody else is realizing the same thing. And people who are getting into the business and thinking they're going to go out and find good fruit, it won't exist anymore. Good fruit is all going to be taken by growers who have formed their own business in a winery or vintners who have locked up long-term growers--well, but that's really not the case, though, because that's contrary to what I just said. Vintners won't be able to go out and buy fruit unless they own the vineyard. I don't think it will be available anymore. Wineries will own their own vineyards. Growers won't exist. It'll take probably another ten years, but I'll bet you in ten years you won't see any growers.

Hicke: What's that going to do to the marketing and distribution?

Forman: Well, it depends on whether the growers can make decent wine. That's a problem it's kind of fun to think about. Established wineries with good reputations know how to make good wine. Do they know how to convince growers to grow good fruit? Some do, some don't. It depends on what they're willing to pay and what their management is able to do as far as supervising the growers they have contracts with.

On the other hand, if a grower is going to decide to make wine, it's probably going to affect the way he grows grapes. All of a sudden, he's not going to try to squeeze the last grape out of his vineyard, because he's now not trying to make money from the vineyard per se; he's trying to make money from the wine. So I think the quality of the fruit will be raised, the quantity will be decreased--but again, will the grower know how to make wine? Some of them will, some of them won't. It depends on who they're willing to hire and how they're willing to do it.

There seems to be a new wave of very talented winemakers, consultants, out there. It's kind of a new business. They're beginning to be kind of like almost cult superstar people that go from place to place. I think there will be an increased number of capable winemakers--well, this is the sort of project that I'm saying that I'd like to do with Toby.

I think the fruit quality would be raised dramatically in the Valley because growers won't be growers anymore; they will be dependent on their wine selling as wine, not grapes. So the quality of the fruit will be raised, the quantity will be decreased because the yield will have to be decreased, and there will be new labels. I don't know how we'll absorb new labels, but--you know, we've got many four or five hundred in the Napa Valley.

You look at Bordeaux alone. They've got 4,000, another 4,000 or 5,000 in Burgundy, another 4,000 or 5,000 in all the other areas. So there are hundreds of thousands of labels in France alone, not to mention Italy and all else. So can the Napa Valley go from 400 labels to 900 labels? Easily. Absolutely no problem.

Hicke: It's going to produce a lot more wine writers to cover all this territory!

Forman: Yes. Well, wine writers are drooling at it because they've got more to write about. Next year there's another ten new ones, another hundred new ones. Always something new to talk about.

Hicke: Exactly.

Forman: So I think it's positive. I think that people are beginning to become a little more sophisticated on wine. The wine consumers are becoming more sophisticated, partly because of the wine writers and partly because the word of mouth is spreading. Your neighbor is drinking wine. Well, let's try it. And they try it, they like it, they get into wine clubs. It's the new thing to do. I think their affluence has a lot to do with it. The world has never been more affluent in history. Affluence means you can afford to buy pleasurable things, and wine is a pleasure--the high-priced wine is. As it is in Europe, it's not a food staple; it's a luxury--the high-priced wine, anyway. There seem to be an unlimited number of people out there that are willing to experiment with this new-found luxury.

Hicke: It has an intellectual challenge to it as well, as we discussed.

Forman: A little bit, yes. It does appeal to people. It's not homogenized milk; it's different every year. It has personality.

Hicke: Glamour, too.

Forman: Yes, it's fun. It's definitely fun. So I see a very bright future for it. I think as the economy takes its cycles, the wine business will, of course, follow right in hand, but it's cyclical,

and it's not going away. This progression of quality and winery-owned vineyards or vineyard wineries will be a thing that will develop and will be here forever. The face will change, and I'll bet you in fifteen to twenty years, there will definitely be a finite number of vineyards planted, because there's only so much land here, and they will all have labels attached to them.

The next step will be fine-tuning the appellations and what they really mean, and you will pretty soon see the Cabernet varieties and the Chardonnay exclusively, and perhaps Pinot Noir. I don't think you'll see much Sauvignon Blanc. You'll see none of the other varieties. I don't even think Zinfandel will exist here for very much longer. I think it will be Pinot Noir, Cabernet varieties, and Chardonnay. And that's all you'll see in the Napa Valley. Pretty soon, from Napa north will be all Cabernet varieties and from Napa south will be all Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and we will be as delimited as France. That's where it'll be. That's what's coming, in my view.

Hicke: What about Merlot?

Forman: No, I say the Cabernet varieties. I mean Cabernet, Merlot, Blanc, and Petit Verdot. North of Napa, that's all you'll see. You won't see any other grape here. And then south of there you'll see Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. And that's all you'll have. And Sonoma will follow in another ten years with the same thing.

Hicke: Well, you're on the right track. I think that's a good place to stop.

Forman: Yes.

Hicke: Have we missed anything crucial?

Forman: Oh, I don't think so.

Hicke: Thanks so much for a really informative and insightful series of interviews.

TAPE GUIDE--Richard Forman

Interview 1: February 24, 1999

Tape 1, Side A	1
Tape 1, Side B	12
Tape 2, Side A	24

Interview 2: February 25, 1999

Continue Tape 2, Side A	30
Tape 2, Side B	36
Tape 3, Side A	47
Tape 3, Side B	57

Interview 3: March 3, 1999

Tape 4, Side A	66
Tape 4, Side B	76
Tape 5, Side A	85
Tape 5, Side B	96

Interview 4: April 19, 1999

Tape 6, Side A	101
Tape 6, Side B	111
Tape 7, Side A	122
Tape 7, Side B not recorded	

APPENDIX

Forman Vineyards Publicity



FORMAN VINEYARD HISTORY

I founded Forman Vineyard in 1983 to fulfill a dream of producing, as a sole proprietor, small quantities of classically made Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

After a 3 year search of the Napa Valley for the perfect location, I purchased, in 1978, the current winery/vineyard site which is perched on a ridge at the base of Howell Mountain overlooking the town of St. Helena. A remarkable site, it has since produced some unusually elegant wines from Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot.

The Chardonnay is grown in a vineyard in Rutherford named appropriately "Rutherford Star". Founded as a partnership venture, the vineyard has, due to its prime location and deep gravel loam profile, produced consistent quality.

The soil is the essence of a wine's finesse. The Cabernet vineyard below the winery is boldly surrounded by a shelf of massive grey volcanic rock which protects and moderates the climate in this tiny "clos de la roche". The exposure is multifaceted due to the rolling terraced layout. The vineyard radiates in the sun showing its unusually distinct pink color. It is a very austere soil made up of pink volcanic gravel, sand and a sparse bit of humus. When cultivated, it folds as though it was sugar displaying its remarkable friability and hence its propensity to drain well allowing vine roots to search for their existence. It is in these rare soils and in the sublime Napa Valley climate that the wines are made.

A philosophy of winemaking which follows more a traditional approach as opposed to technological appealed to me early in my career. I would say that a familiarity with European tradition has seriously influenced my style and hence the fashion with which I designed and built my winery.

Grapes are gently handled from harvest thru fermentation. Small stainless steel fermentors for red wines and new Burgundy barrels for white seem fitting for the need to pay close attention to detail during the winemaking process.

Deep caves have been constructed which maintain a cool dark and humid environment in which to age red wines in new French oak barrels. The wines literally age in the soils from which they grew. The integration of the small stone cellar settled in the hillside surrounded by a courtyard and in touch with the deep caves below set a mood which would recall that of a tiny European Estate.

Thus, with a wonderfully situated vineyard and deliberately planned cellar, I am fulfilling my dream and am constantly vigilant in personally making sure that each step is uncompromised in the pursuit of producing the finest quality possible from my estate.

Wine Spectator's

CALIFORNIA WINE

by James Laube

FORMAN VINEYARD

St. Helena, Napa Valley F: 1983. O: Richard Forman.

W: Richard Forman. S: Chateau La Grande Roche.

OVERALL \$23-30 ★★★★★

WINE RATINGS

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley ★★★★★

Chardonnay Napa Valley ★★★★★

Chateau La Grande Roche Pinot Noir, Napa Valley ★★

WINERY DATA

C: 4,000. V: 86 acres in St. Helena, Napa valley, Rutherford. G: Chardonnay (43 acres), Cabernet Sauvignon (30), Merlot (7), Cabernet Franc (3), Petite verdot (2). P: None.

Ric Forman has filled his life wall to wall with Napa Valley wine and has had a hand in developing many important wines. While a student at U.C. Davis, he worked at Stony Hill, the famous Chardonnay estate. After school he worked briefly at Robert Mondavi Winery. In 1968 he was hired at age 24 to be winemaker for the new Sterling Vineyards winery, where he worked until 1978, in the process developing new wines such as Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot while defining the Sterling Reserve Cabernets. After Sterling he had a brief stint at Newton before starting his own winery in the hills east of St. Helena near the Meadowood Resort.

Forman has acquired 86 acres of vineyard, mostly Chardonnay and Cabernet, and his focus is on those two wines. His Cabernet (2,200 cases) is a Bordeaux-style blend containing Merlot and Cabernet Franc. He makes 1,800 cases of his estate-grown Chardonnay. Both wines show a definite house style that's very consistent. The Cabernet aims for finesse and understated flavors, rarely overwhelms but charms with its subtlety and grace.

His Chardonnay is one of the few left in Napa that doesn't undergo malolactic fermentation, the goal (which he achieves) being a longer-lived wine that develops character and complexity in the bottle.

WINERY STAR RATING

5 Star ★★★★★

Araujo Estate Wines

Au Bon Climat

Beringer Vineyards

Caymus Vineyards

Della Valle Vineyards

Diamond Creek Vineyards

Dominus Estate

Dunn Vineyards

El Molino

Gary Farrell Wines

Forman Vineyard

Grace Family Vineyards

Kistler Vineyards

Marcassin Winery

Matanzas Creek Winery

Robert Mondavi Winery

Opus One

Patz & Hall Wine Co.

Ridge Vineyards

J. Rochioli Vineyard

Sanford Winery

Spottswoode Winery

Williams & Selyem Winery

TASTING NOTES

CABERNET SAUVIGNON NAPA VALLEY (★★★★★):

Packs in lots of complex flavors, but finesse and grace are its signature. Ages very well.

1992: Weaves together a pretty- array of ripe cherry, currant and spicy oak flavors, with an earthy edge. Very well focused, young and vibrant, but in need of cellaring until 1999 or so. 92

1991: Inky and raw like a barrel sample, but it serves up lots of concentrated currant, spice and cherry flavors, finishing with a peppery, tannic edge. 89

1990: Sleek and elegant, with tight, firm, focused herb, currant, cedar and spice flavors. This youthful and concentrated wine finishes with fine tannins, but needs short-term cellaring to soften and develop. 90

1989: Ripe and supple, a fleshy wine with a soft texture and enough backbone to carry the currant and spice flavors. It hints at anise and herbs, but remains fruity. 88

1988: Solid tea, black cherry and currant flavors are backed by strong, rich tannins; shows more depth and concentration than most '88s. Picks up an herbal, oak note on the aftertaste. 88

1987: Ripe and intense, with concentrated currant, cherry, cedar and spice flavors that are tightly wound, firm and tannin. Has a supple, smooth texture before the tannins build up. 93

1986: A beautifully sculpted wine, rich and cedary, with vibrant currant, plum and spice flavors that are lean and concentrated, finishing with firm tannins. 93

1985: Very rich and cedary, with a touch of elegance and finesse and deep currant, spice and plum flavors. Finishes with fine, smooth tannins; it's focused long and complex. 93

1984: Rich, forward and delicious, a splendid Cabernet with supple, layered black cherry, currant and anise flavors framed by toasty oak and smooth tannins. 92

1983: Mature and drinking well, holding its core of rich, complex currant, berry and spice flavors. 90

CHARDONNAY NAPA VALLEY (★★★★★):

Starts out crisp and tight, but blossoms in the bottle, showing flinty apple and citrus notes.

1992: Crisp and lean, with lots of spice notes, but also sharply focused apple, pear and nectarine flavors. 89

1991: Tart, lean and crisp, with spicy lemon, honey, pear and toast notes. Youthful, concentrated and full of flavor, but will require time to open and be more generous. 89

1990: Tight, firm and crisp, with intense, focused pear, pineapple, peach and citrus flavors and a pretty overlay of toasty, buttery oak notes. 90

1989: Tight and tart, with melon, pear, citrus and butterscotch flavors that are ripe and attractive, finishing with good length. 88

1988: Intense, concentrated and complex, with pear, pineapple, spicy oak, peach and vanilla notes that gain prominence on the finish. 92

1987: Plenty of fresh, ripe pear, spice, butter and toast notes that are long and tasty. 89

1986: Toasty and smoky, with richness, depth and intensity and a smooth, silky texture to the ripe lemon, pear, butterscotch and smoke notes. 92

1985: Amazing for its depth, intensity and sheer elegance, offering great complexity, with tiers of rich, toasty butterscotch, honey, citrus and spice flavors. 93

CHATEAU LA GRANDE ROCHE PINOT NOIR NAPA VALLEY (★★):

1991: Rich, full-bodied, complex and flavorful. The spicy, smoky cherry and plum flavors are long on the finish. Supple enough to drink now, but has the depth to cellar through 1998. 85

liquid Assets

CALIFORNIA'S TOP

CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

It was only a few years ago that America's wine writers were announcing that mature California cabernets were not worth their storage costs. With the continued very dramatic growth of Butterfield's San Francisco auctions, there is now a good supply of mature California cabernet sauvignon arriving on the market so that buyers can see for themselves just how well these wines age. The willingness of buyers to spend hard earned cash for properly matured California cabernets indicates that these wines deserve a place in the best wine cellars.

We first constructed a ranking of California's top cabernets seven years ago. We used a simple, tried and true test to determine our ranking: we based our ranking on the prices the wines fetched in arm's length transactions in the auction rooms. Instead of using the size of a winery's advertising budget, or the ratings of a few wine writers (no doubt influenced by the same budgets and boondoggles), we rank the wines based on what consumers are prepared to pay in order to drink the mature wines. This is the method that was used to construct the original ranking of the top wines of Bordeaux in 1855.

We have developed a new ranking to show the extraordinary changes that have taken place over the past seven years in California. For one thing, many of the top wines today (Opus I, Caymus Special Selection, Dunn Howell Mountain) barely existed eight years ago. In addition, many long time favorites (Trefethen, Mt. Eden Vineyard, Martini) have lost so much visibility that they no longer make the list of wines that sell regularly at auction. Finally, some familiar wineries of a decade ago (Inglenook) no longer exist at all!

How the Ranking Was Made

We prepared our ranking of California cabernet sauvignon producers by comparing the prices of all the mature wines sold at auction in the last year. This provided us with data on over 2,000 transactions, a dramatic increase in the total auction sales of these wines over previous years. We compared wines from the same vintage sold in San Francisco (accounting for over one-half the cabernet sold), Chicago, and New York. Sales of California cabernet sauvignon in the auctions of London and Amsterdam are negligible.

NEW CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON CLASSIFICATION

Based on Prices of Vintages from 1968 through 1985

Rank, Vineyard & Price as a Percent of Beaulieu Vyd's. Private Reserve

1. Caymus Special Selection	366%	9. Dunn Napa	142 %
2. Opus I	242	10. Beringer Reserve Napa	141
3. Stag's Leap Wine Clrs. Csk. 23	239	11. Chateau Montelena Napa	139
4. Dunn Howell Mountain	215	12. Dominus Napa	129
5. Heitz Martha's Vineyard	206	13. Silver Oak Alexander Valley	119
6. Spottswoode Napa	172	14. Joseph Phelps Insignia	114
7. Ridge Monte Bello	155	15. Forman Napa	114
8. Silver Oak Napa	150		

FOURTH EDITION

PARKER'S

WINE BUYER'S

GUIDE

FORMAN WINERY (NAPA)

Cabernet Sauvignon **, Chardonnay ******

1991 Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa D	94
1990 Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa D	92
1992 Chardonnay	Napa C	88

Rick Forman continues to be one of the best practitioners of nonmalolactic-fermented Chardonnay. The 1992 Chardonnay possesses excellent purity, ripe fruit, medium body, and a crisp, tart, tasty finish. It is a delicious, lively Chardonnay for drinking over the next 1-2 years. For readers' information, a vertical tasting of the Forman Chardonnays from the mid-eighties through recent releases poignantly revealed that (1) they survive as they get older, (2) they become greener and more Sauvignon-like with each additional year of cellaring, and (3) because of the green, tart acidity that develops, they are far less enjoyable after 2-3 years of cellaring than when they are young. For these reasons, I recommend drinking them within their first several years of life.

Forman's 1991 Cabernet Sauvignon (packaged in a heavy, broad-shouldered bottle) may be the most im-

pressive Cabernet he has made. The wine's softer, fleshier palate suggests a lighter hand in acidification. The saturated black/ruby/purple color is followed by copious aromas of wonderfully rich and ripe cassis intertwined with vague mineral and vanilla scents. Full bodied, with terrific richness, layers of fruit, and a multidimensional personality, this gorgeously made, opulent Cabernet Sauvignon can be drunk now or cellared for 15-20 years. Forman's 1990 Cabernet Sauvignon is a deep purple-colored wine displaying a superexpressive nose of black currants, licorice, and vanillin. With a beautifully etched, medium- to full-bodied feel, exquisite concentration, decent acidity, and firm but soft, sweet tannins, this is a graceful, authoritatively flavored Cabernet for drinking over the next 12-15 years.

The Top 100

39

California

Wine Spectator Yearbook

by James Laube

Wine Spectator

SELECTED FROM THE HIGHEST-RATED, MOST WIDELY AVAILABLE WINES REVIEWED IN 1995.

TOP-RATED WINES

Cabernet Sauvignon

93

Forman

Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley 1992 \$30

Weaves together an array of ripe cherry, currant, and spicy oak flavors, and adds a trim of earthy character. Well focused, young and vibrant.

TOP-RATED WINES

Chardonnay

91

Forman

Chardonnay Napa Valley 1994 \$23

A delicious young wine that balances intensity with elegance in a ripe, fruity, moderately rich wine. Features ripe pear, spice, melon and fig notes, finishing with toasty oak and smoky nuances.

93

Forman

Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley 1992 \$30

The name of Forman has been associated with great Napa Cabernet for decades and this '92 Cab will only add to winemaker Rick Forman's prestige. This is an intense wine that weaves together an array of gorgeous fruit character and spicy oak flavors along with a good backbone of ripe tannins. Wait until 1999 to try it. (2,000 cases made)

Wine Spectator

CABERNET ALL-STARS

FORMAN VINEYARD

Napa Valley

Best recent vintages 1992 (93), 1991 (89), 1990 (89)

Price \$30

Cases 2,000

Owner Ric Forman

Winemaker Ric Forman

Greatest older vintages 1987, 1986, 1985, 1984, 1983

When phylloxera began to spread in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ric Forman figured he'd have to replant his Cabernet vineyard and buy grapes, which would have changed his wine style. Phylloxera never really took hold in his gravelly vineyard and the vines have remained healthy, leading to a string of fine vintages from 1990 to 1992. Forman aims for elegance and finesse with his Cabernet and the wine is usually marked by fine detail and tannins. But they can be big, too; the 1991 was dense and chewy on release. The 1992 has in it small amounts of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, and it's bright, rich and lively. Some 25 percent of the Forman Cabernet comes from a Thorvilos Vineyard, which he co-owns with Dave Abreu. It lies adjacent to his main vineyard at the base of Howell Mountain.

TOP CABERNETS

Araujo Eisele Vineyard

Beaulieu Private Reserve

Beringer Private Reserve

Caymus Special Selection

Chateau Montelena

The Montelena Estate

Dalla Valle Napa Valley and Maya

Diamond Creek Gravelly Meadow,
Red Rock and Volcanic Hill

Dominus Napa Valley

Duckhorn Napa Valley

Dunn Howell Mountain

Flora Springs Reserve

Forman Napa Valley

Grace Napa Valley

Groth Reserve

Heitz Martha's Vineyard

The Hess Collection Napa
Valley and Reserve

Robert Mondavi Reserve

Opus One Napa Valley

Joseph Phelps Insignia

Ridge Monte Bello

Shater Stags Leap

Hillside Select

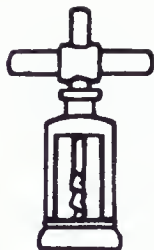
Silverado Limited Reserve

Spottswoode Napa Valley

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

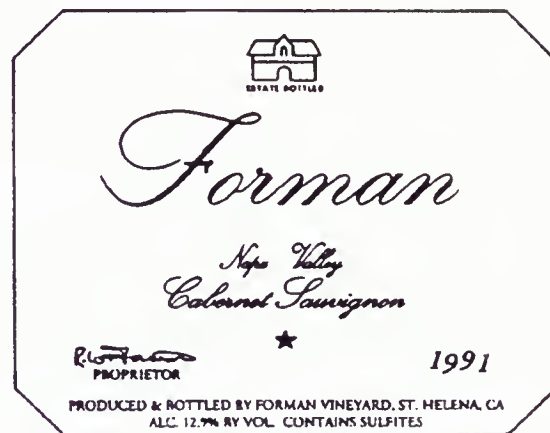
Cask 23

Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s



The WINE ADVOCATE®

Independent consumer's bimonthly guide to Fine Wine



FORMAN VINEYARDS

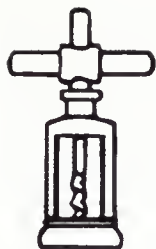
1991	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$32.00)	RED	94
1992	CHARDONNAY	NAPA	(\$24.00)	WHITE	88

Rick Forman continues to be one of the best practitioners of non-malolactic Chardonnay. The 1992 Chardonnay possesses excellent purity, ripe fruit, medium body, and a crisp, tart, tasty finish. It is a delicious, lively Chardonnay for drinking over the next 1-2 years. For readers information, a vertical tasting of the Forman Chardonnays from the mid-eighties through recent releases poignantly revealed that (1) they survive as they get older, (2) they become greener and more Sauvignon-like with each additional year of cellaring, and (3) because of the green, tart acidity that dominates, they are far less enjoyable after 2-3 years of cellaring than when

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Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s



The WINE ADVOCATE®

Independent consumer's bimonthly guide to Fine Wine

FORMAN VINEYARDS

1994	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA (not yet released)	RED	(91-93)
1993	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA (\$35.00)	RED	92
1992	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA (\$32.00)	RED	91
1994	CHARDONNAY	NAPA (\$27.00)	WHITE	89
1994	MERLOT	NAPA (not yet released)	RED	(89-90)

It seems like yesterday that Ric Forman began his career, yet he is now one of California's veteran wine-makers. From his early days (nearly 20 years ago) at Sterling he has built an impressive resumé. The proprietor of beautiful vineyards tucked high in the hills between the Silverado Trail and Conn Valley, he has launched a new wine, a Merlot from a vineyard called Thorvilos, that he developed along with the well-known viticulturist David Abreu. The 1995, which had just finished malolactic fermentation, blew me away, but the wine will not be in the marketplace for several years. The 1994 Merlot's arrival is more imminent. It is a seductive, wonderfully ripe, rich, nicely textured, full-bodied, exquisitely pure wine with berry/mocha-like flavors. It should drink well for 12-15 years. It is the first vintage for Forman's Merlot.

The 1994 Cabernet Sauvignon (80% Cabernet Sauvignon / 20% Cabernet Franc) is a sweet, broad, gorgeously pure and well-delineated wine with an opaque purple color. It is typical of many Forman Cabernets - rich but gracefully constructed, without any excess. All of its components - fruit, glycerin, acidity, alcohol and wood - are beautifully balanced and integrated. It will-drink well young and last for 20+ years. The 1993 Cabernet Sauvignon is a more muscular wine, with considerable tannin (sweet rather than astringent), full body, outstanding ripeness, admirable purity, and a long, textured structured finish. Although approachable, 3-4 years of cellaring are warranted. It, too, is a 20-year wine. The 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon is beginning to shut down and reveal more tannin. Some of the baby fat and thickness have taken a back seat to the

wine's more structured aspects. Rich and full-bodied, it is less flattering and showy than when I first tasted it. It possesses outstanding concentrations, as well as the potential for 20+ years of evolution.

Like Chateau Montelena and Stony Hill, Forman is one of the few members of the old school of California Chardonnay wine-making. Harvesting very ripe fruit, blocking any malolactic fermentation (which means the wine has to be sterile filtered). Ric Forman produces a crisp, honeyed-apple, spring flower blossom-scented wine, that epitomizes the natural fruit character of the Chardonnay varietal. It is always an elegant, graceful wine that offers a Chablis-like alternative to the fatter, more creamy-textured, malolactic Chardonnays. Forman was generous enough to do a vertical tasting of his Chardonnays to try and convince me of their ageability. Certainly the effects of sterile filtration preclude the possibility of any real bouquet development. Older Chardonnays that were still in good shape, such as 1984, 1985, and 1986 revealed no aromatics, but on the palate they possessed various degrees of honeyed apple and citrusy fruit, as well as fresh and lively personalities. But if readers are "nose" people who like to be set up and seduced by a wine's aromatics, they will likely be disappointed by the old, stale paper-scented bouquets. Nevertheless, these wines do hold up in the mouth. I suspect most malolactic Chardonnays would be dead at age 10, but how important is ageability in Chardonnays. I drink many of my California Chardonnays within hours of purchase! Tel. (707) 963-0234, Fax (707) 963-5384
Closing Date: 12-23-95
Issue 102

The Wine Journal

A DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S FINEST WINES AND SPIRITS



Forman Winery.

Ric Norman has been producing consistently fine Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay at his winery on Howell Mountain since 1982. His 1991 and 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon were both outstanding, as was his 1992 Chardonnay. To get on his mailing list, write 1501 Big Rock Road, St. Helena, CA 94574.

1994 Chardonnay. Bottled, Not Released.

Lovely perfume and flavors of apple, vanilla, tropical fruit and floral undertone. Elegant, crisp, great style. Lovely. (18)

1993 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley.

Bottled not released.

Lovely perfume of cassis, cedar, vanilla and chocolate. Similar flavors. Elegant, lovely fruit refined, soft tannins. Terrific. (OP) (VGP)

1994 Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep fruit, full complex, tannic finish. (OP)

1994 Merlot. Lovely fruit, supple, delicious. Sure to be lovely. (OP)

FORMAN

The 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley is deeply perfumed with blackberry cassis, spice cedar and vanilla. It has lots of rich fruit, similar to the nose, on the palate that is balanced, full complex and structured. A superb Cabernet and a worthy match for the stunning 1991 - Ric Forman's on a roll (18 1/2).

The 1993 Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley has lovely fragrances and flavors of citrus, vanilla and melon. It is rounded, fruity, with a nice, crisp finish—a lovely Sauvignon Blanc (17). \$14

Wine Spectator

Cellar Selection

Highly Recommended



93

Forman

Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1992 \$30

An intense wine that weaves together a pretty array of ripe cherry, currant and spicy oak flavors, and adds a trim of earthy character. Very well focused, young and vibrant, but needs at least until 1999 to open up. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 2,000 cases made.

91

Forman

Chardonnay Napa Valley 1994 \$23

A delicious young wine that balances intensity with elegance in a ripe, fruity, moderately rich style. Features ripe pear, spice, melon and fig notes, finishing with toasty oak and smoky nuances. 1,800 cases made.

Stephen Tanzer's



International Wine Cellar

the consumer's passport to fine wine

Forman winery

Ric Forman makes a consistently stylish, rather understated cabernet that actually complements food. It is a wine that typically combines California fruit and French restraint—never a massive cabernet, although the infant '94 displays some of the density of this highly successful vintage. Forman's no-malolactic chardonnay, which often shows a steely Chablis-like quality, similarly works well at the table—in contrast to so many heavily oaked, butterscotch-and-tropical fruit examples from Napa Valley. Forman also offers a small quantity of sauvignon blanc, and beginning with '94 will bottle a varietal merlot from his own vineyard.

1994 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley (includes petit verdot, cabernet franc and merlot): Good fresh deep red. Reticent licorice scent. Sweet, fat and (atypically) dense; really quite a big boy. Seemed considerably more concentrated than a mouthfilling and more aromatically expressive sample of '94 merlot from barrel. Long, sweet aftertaste, with the tannins buried in fruit. 91-94. 1993 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley: Very good red-ruby. Perfumed, sappy, black cherry aroma. Lush, gentle, and

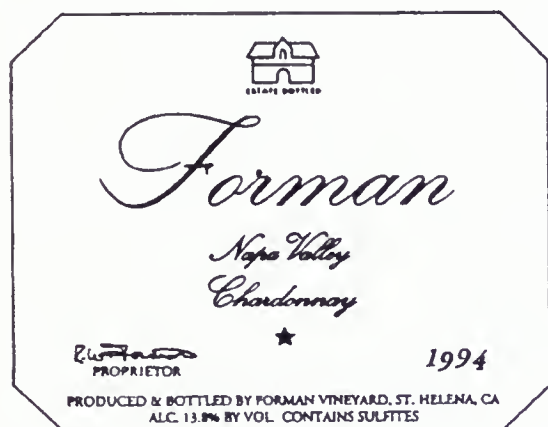
smaller-scaled than the '94—more typical of the Forman style. Rather closed on the palate today. Shows a firmer structure and a tannic edge today because the wine is not as densely packed as the above. 89-91. 1992 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley (\$33): Very good deep red. Bright, perfumed aromas of black fruit, coffee and chocolate; smells riper than the '93. Lush and concentrated, with notes of superripeness but also very good grip. Long, ripely tannic aftertaste. Closer to '94 than '93 in style. Has a Médoc-like suavity. 91. 1994 Chardonnay Napa Valley (approx. \$25): Pale color. Subtle nose combines acacia flower, honey and wet hay—aromas I always associate with ripe Chablis. Excellent intensity and freshness of flavor, but acidity seems lower than in the more penetrating '93. This is fatter and broader-shouldered than the '93 and should be accessible earlier on. 89-90. 1994 Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley (\$15; "the sauvignon is full of acid," says Forman, "so I added some much flatter semillon,"): Musky, green apple nose reminiscent of white Graves. Good cut in the mouth, but on the lean, even austere, side despite the semillon influence. Slightly bitter but refreshing finish offers strong grip. 87.

Stephen Tanzer's



International Wine Cellar

the consumer's passport to fine wine



1993 Chardonnay

Forman Napa Valley (\$24): Subdued, fine, spearmint and mineral aromas. Juicy, bright, minerally fruit is high-pitched and penetrating, with strong but well-integrated acids. Long bracing, citric finish. The 13.8% alcohol is practically invisible in this classy, firm, very young wine. More Chablis than California style. 91(+?).

94 Chardonnay

Forman Napa Valley (\$27) Very pale color. Pungent citric, brothy, steely nose hints at talc; more Chablis than California. Firm, racy and focused, with very strong extract. Very long, subtle finish coats the palate with powdered stone. Became thicker and spicier as it opened in the glass. Very classy, no-malo chardonnay, with a track record for aging extremely well. 92.



1994 Sauvignon Blanc

Forman Napa Valley (\$14): Very fresh aromas of spearmint, green apple, and minerals. Bright and penetrating in the mouth, with a vibrant grapefruit rind flavor. Very good intensity of flavor. A firm, lean, very young wine of noteworthy structure. Should prove to be a flexible food wine. But this is not for fans of fat, spicy sauvignon blancs made in the style of chardonnay. 89(+?).

1992 Cabernet

Forman Napa Valley (\$32): Very dark purple-red. Claret-like nose of cassis, shoe polish and spice. Quite intense and tightly packed, but in contrast to recent Forman vintages, this cabernet has a density and texture that make it easier to taste early on. Quite suave, St. Julien-like wine, with a long, powerful finish. Great potential. 91(+?).

California GRAPEVINE



1993 CHARDONNAY

More New Releases



1. 1993 Forman, Napa Valley (\$22) - Medium-light golden yellow color; attractive, initially subdued, earthy, floral, toasty, lemony, green apple, ripe Chardonnay fruit aroma which developed depth and intensity with airing; medium-full body; intense, toasty, green apple flavors with firm acidity; well structured; slightly tart finish; lingering aftertaste. Above-average to superior quality. This wine shows well integrated fruit and oak though it deserves another year or two of bottle aging. **Very highly recommended.** 13.8% alcohol; 0.76 TA; 3.36 pH; 1,800 cases; 100% barrel fermented (BF); 0% malolactic fermentation (MF); released October 1994. (Group Score: 16.0 of 20 points, 5 of 15 first-place votes/0 seconds/1 third; My Score: 17 [92 of 100 points], first place)

Retyped from information
provided by Forman Vineyard

Winery: Forman

Location: Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

The Wine: Estate Merlot

Vintage: 1997

Appellation: Napa Valley

Varietal Blend: 90% Merlot, 10% Petite Verdot

Cooperage: 20 months in 80% new, 20% once used French oak

Total Production: 525 cases

Winemaker: Ric Forman

Vineyard Source: 60% Thorvilos Vineyard (at the base of Howell Mountain), 40% Rutherford

Total Cases Available at Winebid.com: ten .750-liter, 12-bottle cases

Reserve Prices: .750 Liter Bottles: \$30

Estimated Release Price: \$35-\$40

Release Date: Fall 1999

About the Vineyard Source:

The "Thorvilos Vineyard" was planted and is owned by Ric Forman and David Abreu in 1989. Located at the base of Howell Mountain in the Napa Valley appellation, it holds Cabernet Sauvignon (Martha's Vineyard Clone and Clone 337), Merlot (Clone 181), Cabernet Franc (Clone 1), and Petite Verdot. Used to make the Forman Cabernet Sauvignon since 1994, previous harvests have been used by Pahlmeyer and Merryvale wineries. Colgin's "Lamb" Vineyard neighbors this stunning property.

Winemaker's Comments on the Vintage:

Rain started earlier in 1997 than many previous seasons and was quite prolific during November, December and January. By February, however, it stopped altogether and became quite mild. In fact, the whole winter was warm. Bud break was early due to the mild winter and the vines grew quickly in early spring. Summer progressed with rather even heat with no real serious spikes in either direction. Harvest began very early--on August 23 for the Chardonnay, September 2 for Merlot and September 23 for Cabernet Sauvignon. The uniform summer assured fully ripe grapes and the early harvest held ample acidity for well balanced wines.

Winemaker's Comments on the Wine:

Bright Ruby Red. Rich and alluring aromas of ripe cherry, mulberry and a touch of violets are evolving nicely in this developing wine. Full sweet and spicy Merlot fruit abounds in the mouth and is further rounded by a good integration of new oak. This is a very promising wine.

Bottling in June should capture the essence of what is developing so nicely now.

Comments By the Press On the 1997 Forman Merlot:

Robert Parker, "The Wine Advocate" - December 23, 1998

"The 1997 Merlot reveals more lushness and accessibility than Forman's wines sometimes do. It boasts a dark ruby color, followed by an attractive nose of black cherries and berries intermingled with soil notes, subtle oak, and floral scents. Medium-bodied and delicious, it should be accessible when bottled next year. Moreover, it should last for at least a decade." 87-90 points.

The Fine Wine Review, #68 1998

"The 1997 Merlot shows crunchy, crushed berry fruit and some oak on the nose, and oak and cherry fruit in the mouth with a luscious texture. This is a forward wine that should be excellent for drinking early on." 89-92 points.

Winery: Forman

Location: Howell Mountain, Napa Valley

The Wine: Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

Vintage: 1997

Appellation: Napa Valley

Varietal Blend: 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, 7% Petite Verdot

Cooperage: 20 months in 80% new, 20% once used French oak

Total Production: 2,200 cases

Winemaker: Ric Forman

Vineyard Source: Thorvilos Vineyard (at the base of Howell Mountain)

Total Cases Available at Winebid.com: ten .750-liter, 12-bottle cases

Reserve Prices: .750-liter bottles: \$45

Estimated Release Price: \$45-\$50

Release Date: Spring 2000

About the Vineyard Source:

The "Thorvilos Vineyard" was planted and is owned by Ric Forman and David Abreu in 1989. Located at the base of Howell Mountain in the Napa Valley appellation, it holds Cabernet Sauvignon (Martha's Vineyard Clone and Clone 337), Merlot (Clone 181), Cabernet Franc (Clone 1), and Petite Verdot. Used to make the Forman Cabernet Sauvignon since 1994, previous harvests have been used by Pahlmeyer and Merryvale wineries. Colgin's "Lamb" Vineyard neighbors this stunning property.

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Winemaker's Comments on the Wine:

Deep claret red. Very focused nose for its youth. A deep berry/cassis aroma dominates the entrance but is followed with aeration, by complex Bordeaux-like, cedar/earthy notes. Very powerful style here with more

concentration in the nose than is usually expected at this early stage of development. A very mouthfilling sweet fruit is deliciously balanced with wood and soft acid/tannin structure. Aftertastes of cedar, underbrush and violets are remarkable for this early point in the wine's evolution. This should be a very fine wine with true breed and distinction.

Comments By the Press On the 1997 Cabernet:

Robert Parker, Jr.'s The Wine Advocate, 12/23/98 Issue:

"The 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon displays a saturated ruby/purple color, and an exceptional bouquet of blackberry and cassis fruit intermingled with cedar, herbs and wood spice. The wine is deep, medium to full-bodied, and richly fruity with firm tannin in the moderately long, ripe finish. Like many 1997s, it will be enjoyable in its youth, yet will last for 15 or more years." 90-92 points.

Wine Spectator, August 31, 1998 Issue

"Intense, lively, well focused, rich and brimming with racy wild berry, cherry, anise, cedar and spice. Finishes with a long, lingering aftertaste." 95-100 points.

Fine Wine Review, #68, 1998

"The 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon is more closed, but quite noble in the mouth and somewhat austere, long blueberry, cherry and mulberry fruit. In the past, I have found his Cabernets to be St. Julien, in style, this one is more Pauillac."

Jim Laube, "Wine Spectator's California Wine"

"The Cabernet aims for finesse and understated flavors, rarely overwhelms, but charms with its subtlety and grace." Named a "5-Star" Winery.

Stephen Tanzer, International Wine Cellar

"Ric Forman makes a consistently stylish, rather understated cabernet that actually compliments food. It is a wine that typically combines California fruit and French restraint."

INDEX--Richard Forman

- Abreu Vineyards Cabernet, 108
 Abreu, David, 37-39, 106-109, 124
 Adamson Vineyard, 72, 89
 Akioshi, Min, 14
 Amerine, Maynard, 13, 16, 18
- Beaulieu Vineyard, 119
 Berg. Hod, 14
 Bertleson, Alf, 96
 Boiadjieff, Gene, 70, 90-92, 100
 Bucharaz, Suzanne, 90
- C. Norman Peterson company, 17
 Chalone Vineyard, 116
 Chalone Vineyard, 22
 Chateau Barrique, 74-75
 Chateau le Grande Roche, 80
 Coca Cola Co., 63-64, 66, 68
 Coffrin, David, 15
 cooperage, 25-26, 33-36, 74-76
 Crane, Phil, 10
- Dale, Joy, 22-23, 65, 67, 80, 90
 Davies, Jack, 24, 99
 Duckhorn, Dan, 35-37
 Dyer, Bill, 62-63
- equipment, 22, 34, 58, 73, 95
- Fenghi, Mills, 15
 fermentation, 19, 34, 76-78;
 malolactic, 45-47, 77
 Forman Vineyard, 72-114
 Forman, Peter, 5, 7, 9-10
 Forman, Robert White, 1
 Forman, Rosalind Wallace, 2-3, 5,
 7
 Forman, Toby, 83, 99, 122-123
 Freemark Abbey, 16, 116
- Fuller, Bill, 22
- Graff, Richard, 22-23, 25, 27-28,
 34, 46, 60, 76, 119
 grapes:
 Bordeaux varieties, 71-72
 Cabernet Sauvignon, 78
 Chardonnay, 72, 110
 Chenin Blanc, 43
 French Colombard, 43
 Petit Verdot, 104-105
 Pinot La Fata, 43
 Sauvignon Blanc, 71
 Zinfandel, 87
- Halley, Vern, 83
 hedging, 38-39
 Heitz, Joe, 115
 Henshaw, Fritz, 9
 Hill, William, 70
 Holmes, Fred, 83
 Hudson, Chuck, 25
- Inglenook, 82, 107, 119
- Jackson, Jess, 47
 Jaeger Billy, 16
 Johnson, Irwin, 93
- Keith & Assoc., 60
 Kendall-Jackson Vineyards &
 Winery, 47, 115-116
 Kornell, Hans, 44
 Kunde, Rich, 15
 Kunke, Ralph, 14
- labels, vineyard-designated, 41
 Lemon, Ted, 82

Long, Zelma, 20

Madrona Ranch, 108
Maldonado, Lupe, 69, 74
Martha's Clone, 85
Martha's Vineyard, 85
McCrae, Fred, 16, 18-19, 28, 115
Meyer, Justin, 15
Mondavi, Michael, 20
Mondavi, Robert, 16, 19-20, 116
Moueix, Christian, 29

Nadalier barrels, 74-75
Nagaoka, Richard, 15
Newton Vineyard, 63-82
Newton, Peter, 16, 21-82
Newton, Sua Ha, 80

Oliver, Reg, 72, 109-110

Potts, Frank, 10
pricing, 56-57

Ridge Vineyards, 52
Robert Mondavi Winery, 16, 19-20,
25, 27
rootstocks, 84-85
Rosenbrand, Theo, 62
Rutherford Star Vineyard, 107-109

San Jose State University, 12
Saunders, Chuck, 70
Schramsberg Vineyards, 25-26
See, Harry, 83
Shaw Vineyard and Winery, 52, 88-
89, 101
Singleton, Vernon L., 14
Staglin Ranch, 107
Star Vineyards, 52
Sterling Vineyards, 16, 21-65,
116
Stern, Pete, 15
Stewart, Lee, 115

Stone, Michael, 25, 67-68
Stony Hill Vineyard, 16-19

Talcott Vineyard, 109
Tchelistcheff, Andre, 119
Thorvilos Vineyard, 124
Three Palms Vineyard, 16, 36
Torvillos Vineyard, 40
Traverso, Sergio, 62
tunnels, 96-100

University of California,
Berkeley, Chemistry Dept., 17-
18
University of California, Davis,
12-15
Upton, Sloane, 16

Villa Mt. Eden Winery, 82
vineyard management, 31-32, 37-
38, 68-74, 103-104, 121-122;
see also hedging

Warner, Brad, 20
Waterfield, Martin, 25, 61
Webb, A. Dinsmore, 14
Weibel Champagne Vineyards, 18
winemaking, techniques of, 45-46,
49-51, 53-56, 76-80; see also
fermentation
winery, design and building of,
59-61, 72-73, 90-95
wines:
Beaujolais, 114
Cabernet Franc, 29, 89, 106
Cabernet Sauvignon, 26, 28,
29, 45, 48-50, 53-56, 78-79,
85-86, 89, 101-103, 118-121
Chardonnay, 24, 27-28, 30, 46-
47, 55, 76-78, 109-112, 114,
115-118
Chablis, 112
Chenin Blanc, 44
French Colombard, 43

wines (cont'd.)

Merlot, 26, 29-30, 37, 45, 57,
80, 89, 106
Petit Verdot, 29, 104-105
Pinot Noir, 45
Winiarski, Warren, 20
Winkler, Albert J., 85-86
Woltner, Winery, 82, 88

Carole E. Hicke

B.A., University of Iowa; economics

M.A., San Francisco State University; U.S. history with emphasis on the American West; thesis: "James Rolph, Mayor of San Francisco."

Interviewer/editor/writer, 1978-present, for business and law firm histories, specializing in oral history techniques. Independently employed.

Interviewer-editor, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1985 to present, specializing in California legal, political, and business histories.

Author: *The Federal Judges Association in the Twentieth Century*; *History of Farella, Braun & Martel*; *Heller, Ehrman, White & McAuliffe: A Century of Service to Clients and Community*.

Editor (1980-1985) newsletters of two professional historical associations: Western Association of Women Historians and Coordinating Committee for Women in the Historical Profession.

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